

## 152-4 RHODE ISLAND'S PLAN FOR RECREATION, CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE

Part Three of this plan documented available outdoor recreation resources, and catalogued important needs of Rhode Island's public outdoor recreation system as identified in the surveys and research conducted for this update.

This part of the plan, is the “meat” of the plan – it identifies ways in which the public's recreational needs and desires can be actualized. Beginning with the exposition of a broad vision for the future growth and development of an integrated system, and identification of a mission for this plan; it then reiterates three enduring goals from prior editions of this Guide Plan – protecting resources, meeting system development needs, and ensuring proper stewardship of the system --- to guide future action. Following these broad goals, are analyses of individual issues that examine more specific needs associated with particular recreational venues or categories of recreational experiences. This part reports on major accomplishments achieved in each of these areas. Policies are established to guide the actions of the State, local governments, and private sector partners in addressing the specific topics and recreational issues described.



This Part also comprises the Plan's five year Action Program. Within each specific issue addressed, an Action Agenda presents strategies the State proposes to pursue during the time-frame of this edition of the plan. Actions proposed encompass planning and coordination activities, legislative initiatives, programmatic modifications, regulatory needs, and capital investment measures (land acquisition and facility development). They reflect the best judgment of the planning process as to how specific problems can be addressed, and progress made towards the plan's broader vision and goals.

### 4-1 Vision, Goals and Policies

#### 4-1-1 The Vision

*A statewide system of connecting greenspaces and greenways, a network made up of critical natural and cultural resources, outdoor recreation facilities, public spaces, community and urban forests, public and private open spaces. The greenspace system is to be Rhode Island's permanent green framework within which the state's communities will design and build in the 21st century.*

#### 4-1-2 Plan Mission

*Strengthen and expand Rhode Island's greenspace and outdoor recreation system. Continue an aggressive program for open space preservation and greenway development. Strengthen relationships between state agencies and municipalities, land trusts, and non-profit conservation organizations.*

#### **4-1-3 Goals for Rhode Island's Outdoor Recreation, Conservation and Open Space System**

**Goal 1: Build the Greenspace Network...Preserve and Protect Natural and Cultural Resources**

*Rhode Island will strengthen and expand the statewide network of greenspaces and greenways, with natural, and cultural resources and outdoor recreation areas as major features of the network.*

**Goal 2: Meeting Critical Needs...Improve Recreation Opportunities and Resource Conservation**

*Rhode Island will improve its system of outdoor recreation facilities and conservation areas to meet the needs of its residents and visitors.*

**Goal 3: Stewardship and Partnership...Improve Accessibility, Operations and Resource Management**

*Rhode Island's public and private partners will join as strong stewards of the state's outdoor recreation and open space system and will protect, maintain, and improve its essential features.*

#### **4-2 Building the Greenspace Network...Preserve and Protect Natural and Cultural Resources**

**Goal 1: *Rhode Island will strengthen and expand its statewide network of greenspaces and greenways, with critical natural resources and outdoor recreation areas as major features of the network.***

##### ***The Greenspace Network, a Statewide System***

*Greenspace and the resources it shelters are, literally and figuratively, the foundation of life in Rhode Island. The state's magnificent bay and its rivers are its lifeblood; the forests, its lungs; and the special places treasured and visited by generations of inhabitants, perhaps as close to an eternal soul as any geopolitical entity can attain.*

*A Greener Path...Green spaces and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future*  
State Guide Plan Element 155, adopted 1994.



Greenspace is, and must continue to be a major component of Rhode Island's landscape. The greenspace network of large open tracts and outdoor recreation areas linked by the greenways must create the "green infrastructure" framework around and within which our future communities are designed and built.

Rhode Island's primary open space preservation and outdoor recreation goal is to continue to assemble and develop, through the concerted efforts of all levels of governments and with support from both public and private interests, the greenspace network as an integrated, statewide system. The system is conceived as multi-faceted and multi-jurisdictional. In its broadest sense, its purpose is in furtherance of the public's rights cited in the Article 1, section 17 of the State's Constitution; namely, that the public "shall be secure in their rights to the use and enjoyment of the natural resources of the state with due regard for the preservation of their values."

The greenspace network thus consists of land and water that is dedicated to, or otherwise encumbered in furtherance of, the public interest in resource conservation and prudent usage. It encompasses both vast tracts of wooded open space and intimate "vest pocket" parks. It includes areas, such as beaches and ball fields that are heavily utilized by the public; but it also embraces water supply watersheds and protected farmland, where the public interest is best served by limiting access. We must protect the high value open space areas which includes the key outdoor recreation facilities. We must continue to assemble a network of protected natural areas linked with the built areas via greenways along rivers, shorelines, trails, bikeways, roadways, pedestrian paths and scenic byways.

The greenspace network is the environmental backdrop against which quality communities are developed. It must extend into established urban centers and neighborhoods in the form of parkland and recreation facilities, landscaped public spaces and green streetscape networks. Greenspace must also be an essential component of private development of all kinds. Integration of useful, effective, connected greenspace must be a design criterion in all of Rhode Island's physical development, and redevelopment – whether in urban, suburban, rural communities, inland or coastal settings.

The greenspace network will serve multiple objectives of state environmental and development policy. Preserved greenspaces constitute an environmental safety net protecting the state's irreplaceable legacy of natural and cultural resources. The network will be a nucleus for the growth development and rejuvenation of diverse, high quality living and working communities. Greenways accommodate and foster health-promoting transportation alternatives, such as bicycling and walking. Finally, the greenspace network is available for public use and provides access to, enjoyment and understanding of the outdoor environment for all.

Over time Rhode Island's efforts to preserve and manage its statewide greenspace system and the recreation system which it contains have achieved some great successes and have grown better connected and stronger. They have also matured and become somewhat institutionalized as have the associated movements for environmental protection, historic preservation, public participation in government, growth management and quality of life.

At the same time pressures causing the loss of open space, and diminution of natural and cultural resources have continued unabated, in many cases, the stakes are much higher and the pace is fast. Fragile resource areas are particularly threatened because they are in great demand for both new residential and new commercial development. Property values and construction costs have skyrocketed in the past several years, requiring tougher strategic decision-making on new acquisitions and facility development as well as operations and maintenance for the greenspace system.

Poorly designed, large scale, and fragmented development threatens each of the individual resources identified in this plan and the value of greenspace as a connected system. Less-recognized as a direct threat to the greenspace system is the effect of deterioration of our traditional centers and neighborhoods. Urban greenspace, offers the residents, workers, shoppers and visitors in our cities and town centers access to both natural resources and recreation. Urban greenspace highlights key natural resources and enlivens the built environment. The incorporation of high quality and abundant greenspace, including a variety of beautiful public spaces, is a key ingredient in all good city planning and successful revitalization, a point superbly illustrated by Providence's nationally-recognized Riverwalk and Waterplace Park. A network of significant greenways lining our waterfronts, rivers, highways and streets is the single best public design approach to connect the traditional centers with the country.

We must move quickly to protect the remaining open space and to revitalize urban centers. We must continue an aggressive program for open space preservation and greenway development. To do so effectively, we must further strengthen the already growing relationships between state agencies, municipalities, land trusts and non-profit conservation organizations.

At the state level, the Governor's Growth Planning Council, established in 2000, is a policy level public-private leadership council investigating broad issues of growth management in Rhode Island and making recommendations to the Governor. A major recommendation is the Council's Growth Centers initiative – intended to create well-designed, concentrated, mixed-use growth centers by focusing state funding incentives within targeted areas identified by municipalities through the local comprehensive planning process.

The Department of Environmental Management is the lead state agency for much of the functional management of the greenspace system, both for state-owned recreational and open space resources and by providing financial and technical assistance to municipalities and other government agencies. The Department's implementation and project management efforts in greenspace development are guided by *Protecting our Land Resources, A Land Acquisition and Protection Plan for the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management* (May, 1996)—a strategic plan that reflects the goals and objectives of the two major State Guide Plans concerning the greenspace system: *Ocean State Outdoors, 2003* (this Plan) and *A Greener Path...Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future*, adopted in 1994.

*Protecting Our Land Resources* describes the Departmental priorities, strategies, and criteria for greenspace protection. The Department's current land protection strategy, based upon reaching the Greenspace and Greenways Plan's objective of protecting 35,000 acres by 2010<sup>1</sup>, translates into a target of acquiring roughly 3,000 acres per year. In light of the rapid growth of the past few years and the continuing loss of greenspace, the State should re-examine the goals set in the Greenspace and Greenways Plan, and the annual targets guiding DEM's strategic plan.

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<sup>1</sup> The State Greenspace and Greenways Plan originally set a target of protecting 35,000 acres via acquisition (by all sectors) by 2020. In 2000, former Governor Almond proposed, and the General Assembly endorsed through enactment of a \$34 million Open Space bond issue, an accelerated program to attain the 35,000 acre acquisition goal by 2010.

Until recently, capital budgets have been a relative bright spot -- with \$34 million devoted to land acquisition in 2000 and \$14 million for Heritage projects in 2002 as well as major renovations at state and local parks and beaches. In 2003, however, uncertainty over public budget revenue shortfalls and the unsettled state of the national economy loom as potential constraints for the near-future development, maintenance and staffing of the greenspace system. However, funding for greenspace protection and recreation has been historically very well-supported by Rhode Islanders. Dating back to the 1930s, many of the great public spaces and resource lands we enjoy today have been assembled by the courage of political leaders, and the foresight of the public to invest in the future, even while they grappled with difficult economic circumstances.

### ***Major Accomplishments***

- Since 1993, DEM has protected approximately 11,000 acres of land, through fee acquisition, easements and development rights. Major projects include:
  - Four wildlife management areas: Nicholas Farm, Black Farm, Eight Rod Farm & Simmons Mill
  - Two Narragansett Bay islands: Rose Island in Newport and Dyer Island in Portsmouth
  - The American Fish Culture hatchery in Richmond
  - The 400+ acre Pine Top ski area in West Greenwich
  - The 10 mile long Trestle Trail in Coventry
  - The 237-acre Rome Point property on Narragansett Bay in North Kingstown (donated by the Narragansett Electric (now National Grid) Company)
- Significant growth of local land trusts, with an increase from fifteen land trusts in 1992 to forty-three land trusts statewide in 2003.
- Development of an inventory of state, municipal and land trust open space holdings for inclusion in the Rhode Island Geographic Information System (RIGIS)
- Development of local comprehensive plans including recreation, open space and natural and cultural resource elements by every community in the state pursuant to 1989 legislation.

**Policy RCOS-1:** *Aggressively pursue creation of an integrated, statewide greenspace and greenways system through coordinated state and local planning, strategic acquisitions, resource protection partnerships, and integration of green infrastructure in development projects.*

### ***Action Agenda 2003-2008***

- Continue strategic land acquisitions consistent with the Greenspace and Greenways Plan and DEM's Land Acquisition and Protection Plan.
- Work to secure funding to continue state and local land protection programs. Propose a State open space bond referendum for consideration for the 2004 election. Study establishment of a self-perpetuating trust fund for open space acquisition, that could also provide funding for contingent acquisition of storm or flood damaged properties in coastal areas and along rivers.

- Resist the avoidable conversion of dedicated greenspace system land to other uses. Subject proposals to convert system land to the highest scrutiny (see section 4-x-x).
- Prepare coordinated guidance for municipalities and not-for-profit organizations to effectively complement the State's land protection programs. Work cooperatively to develop aspects of the greenspace system each sector's authority, mandates and missions.
- Coordinate continued development and maintenance of a statewide database including all categories of protected greenspace, both public and private.
- Cooperate with and build on the efforts of the Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society and local land trusts to identify and preserve key open space areas.
- Expand and enhance the greenspace system through complementary state agency efforts, particularly through inclusion of greenspace in the design of state-supported environmental, transportation, housing and economic development projects. Ensure that greenspace is integral to major state land use initiatives such as the emerging Growth Centers program.
- Update, as necessary, and re-publish the State's greenspace and greenways plan: *A Greener Path...Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future* (1994), State Guide Plan, Element 155.
- Coordinate with The Nature Conservancy to maintain an updated central registry of land trusts and develop an information clearinghouse of technical assistance resources and land trust activities.
- Prepare annual reports assessing progress towards the Greenspace and Greenways Plan's goals, and status of the integrated, statewide greenspace network.
- Convene a major annual meeting to report on status and progress of statewide greenspace system development and to coordinate priorities and efforts of the public-private partnership.
- Periodically review and update standards for community comprehensive plans to include guidance on strengthening the greenspace system within the natural and built areas of communities. Specify appropriate criteria for community-wide inventory, analysis and planning for greenspace requirements as part of updates of community comprehensive plans.
- Encourage communities to develop a Future Open Space Network/Greenspace Network Map within their comprehensive plans that identifies the existing recreation, conservation and open space properties and greenways, the generalized location of key proposed areas and proposed greenway connections, and establishes priorities for future land protection efforts.



- Encourage communities to involve local staff of involved departments -- planning, engineering, recreation, public works, education, key commissions such as Planning and Conservation, representatives from active land trusts and environmental groups and members the general public – in the Comprehensive Community Plan process to develop support for implementation of community greenspace plans.
- Provide planning guidelines and technical assistance for municipalities and not-for-profit groups to enhance the greenspace system within existing built environments -- especially urban and town centers. Include techniques for integrating key natural resources, greenways, parks, public spaces and landscaped streets, and networks of pedestrian paths.
- Develop guidelines and technical assistance for municipalities in local regulation and capital budgeting. Incorporate provisions to improve the municipal systems for outdoor recreation, conservation and open space particularly through zoning and land development and subdivision regulations and through the capital improvement budget.
- Encourage communities to explore innovative techniques for expanding local greenspace networks, such as land banking priority parcels for future public use, transferring development rights from significant open space areas to areas better suited for development, and devoting the local share of the real estate transfer tax, and impact fees to fund the improvement of community open space systems.
- Encourage voluntary preservation of open space by landowners through financial incentives such as special taxing programs, conservation easements and donation of land to land trusts
- Promote the effective use of clustered/open space subdivisions development techniques and evaluate current regulations for effectiveness in achieving the quantity, quality and configuration of open space intended by the community comprehensive plans. Use the local planning and development review processes to connect protected greenspace areas to create a greenway network. Encourage developers to connect private dedicated open space to nearby natural space, trails and other protected open space on nearby lands.
- Encourage communities to require streetscape improvements (e.g. sidewalks, pedestrian paths, verge, trees,) in public rights-of-ways constructed or improved as part of development and subdivision projects to contribute to development of community-wide greenspace-streetscape networks and to connect to other parts of the local system.
- Incorporate greenspace design in all publicly-funded local programs and projects, e.g. neighborhood and urban center revitalization, improvements to all public properties, both town and school facilities, road and right-of-way improvements.
- Encourage communities to foster regional approaches to greenspace and connect municipal greenspace with that of neighboring communities.

## ***Natural Diversity***

A key component of the state's greenspace system is protecting biodiversity through regulation and acquisition, as well as habitat and species management. A particular concern is managing invasive species. The Department of Environmental Management has drafted a plan for protecting natural diversity, *Rhode Island's Living Legacy*. Over the past ten years, the DEM has undertaken projects to restore both coastal and inland habitats and fisheries. The Rhode Island Habitat Team includes the University of Rhode Island, the Coastal Resources Management Council, the US Environmental Protection Agency, DEM, the Army Corps of Engineers and not-for-profit organizations.

## ***Major Accomplishments***

- Land protection, habitat restoration and species management efforts to increase natural diversity have resulted in the return of some species and the growth in breeding populations of other species. DEM's efforts to restore wild turkeys are a notable success, raising the population to over 6,000 since reintroduction in 1980. The Piping Plover population has increased from about 5 active nesting sites and 12 pairs in 1980 to more than 13 active sites and over 50 pairs. With the assistance of the Narragansett Electric Company, DEM has increased the number of osprey nests from 13 in 1978 to 80 active nests in 2001. After an absence of over two hundred years, beavers are returning to areas that have been managed to provide the appropriate conditions for them. Another furbearer that has returned is the fisher.
- The General Assembly passed legislation in 2002 to provide \$250,000 per year for habitat restoration
- The Galilee Bird Sanctuary restoration project, completed in 1998, is the largest habitat restoration project undertaken to date, with 128 acres of coastal habitat restored at a cost of \$2.6 million
- Other significant habitat restorations in process include:
  - Town Pond/Boyd's Marsh salt marsh in Portsmouth
  - Restoration of former Lonsdale Drive-In theater in Lincoln to a freshwater wetland
  - Ten Mile River anadromous fish run
  - Blackstone River fisheries restoration
  - Potter's Cove (Prudence Island) salt marsh
  - South Shore Coastal Habitat

**Policy RCOS-2:** *Maintain natural diversity by preserving the integrity of Rhode Island's ecosystems.*

## ***Action Agenda 2003-2008***

- Continue to emphasize ecosystems, animal habitat value and recreational hunting and fishing in the State's land protection program.
- Continue to work with municipalities, local land trusts, and other nonprofits to protect important natural areas.



- Continue to support the Natural Heritage Program to identify and document important natural areas and features for protection.
- Incorporate the protection of important natural areas and habitats in management plans for public lands.
- Publish *Rhode Island's Living Legacy: Identifying and Preserving the State's Biodiversity*.
- Develop and publish a companion plan to RI's Living Legacy to focus on invasive species.
- Increase high quality habitat through protecting and restoring fresh and saltwater wetlands, fish runs, sea grass beds, river shorelines, forests and other natural areas, and by acquiring land for habitat protection.
- Continue to advocate for state and federal government funding for monitoring and habitat restoration.
- Identify critical natural habitat areas in the Community Comprehensive Plan
- Coordinate with RIDEM's Natural Heritage staff to insure that critical natural habitats are identified and appropriately protected through the subdivision and development review process.

### **Water Resources**

Issues surrounding the protection of water quality and quantity have steadily risen to the top of the list of public concerns. Eighty-four percent of respondents said watershed protection was a very important service for the Department of Environmental Management second only to protecting Narragansett Bay (at 88%). Drinking water quality is of utmost concern. In a broad public survey on Growth and Land Use Issues, conducted for the Statewide Planning Program in 2000, respondents identified “*protecting sources of drinking water*” as their highest concern



Surface water supply reservoirs provide clean, safe, drinking water for over 750,000 Rhode Islanders. About one-quarter of the state obtains drinking water from groundwater sources. Ninety percent of all state residents purchase water from a public water supply system. The balance of the population provide their own water, usually from a well drilled on their property. The potential for contamination of these irreplaceable drinking water sources from land development, hazardous waste sites and leaking fuel tanks is a very real threat.

A number of state agencies have responsibility for various aspects of water resource management and protection in Rhode Island. As identified in Table 152-4(1), these include the Rhode Island Water Resources Board, the Departments of Health and Environmental Management, and the Coastal Resources Management Council (for saltwater resources). Public water supply operators (private and municipal), and municipalities also have significant responsibilities for planning and management to ensure the protection, conservation, and prudent use of the state's water resources.

<b>Table 152-4(1)</b> <b>Water Resource Management in Rhode Island</b> <b>Major Agency and Roles</b>	
<b>Freshwater Resources</b>	<b>Saltwater Resources</b>
<i>RI Water Resources Board (w/major drinking water suppliers)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public Supply Planning &amp; Infrastructure Development</li> <li>Drinking Water Supply Watershed Protection Program</li> <li>Water Supply Management Plans</li> </ul>	<i>RI Coastal Resources Management Council</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coastal Zone Management regulations (CRMC “Red Book”) and permitting</li> <li>Special Area Management Plans</li> <li>Harbor Management Plans</li> <li>Dredging regulations (w/RIDEM and US Army Corps of Engineers)</li> </ul>
<i>R.I. Dept. of Environmental Management</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Surface Water Quality Standards, Regulations &amp; permitting</li> <li>Groundwater/Wellhead Protection Program</li> <li>Individual Sewage Disposal permitting</li> <li>Water Quality Restoration planning</li> <li>Sustainable Watersheds Program</li> <li>Watershed Partnership</li> <li>Freshwater Wetlands Alternation Regulations &amp; permitting</li> </ul>	<i>R.I. Dept. of Environmental Management</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Surface Water Quality Standards, Regulations &amp; permitting</li> <li>Narragansett Bay Estuary Program</li> </ul>
<i>R.I. Department of Health</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public Drinking Water Supply regulation</li> <li>Drinking Water Supply Source Water Assessments</li> </ul>	<i>R.I. Department of Health</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shellfish Management Program (w/US-FDA)</li> </ul>
<i>R.I. Rivers Council</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rivers Classification &amp; Policies</li> <li>Local Watershed Council designation</li> </ul>	
<i>Municipal Governments</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Comprehensive Plans</li> <li>Land management ordinances</li> <li>Water supply management plans (if municipality is a major water supplier)</li> </ul>	

Source: RIDEM

The past decade has also seen increased involvement of local “grassroots” organizations and citizens in water quality protection. The RI Rivers Council was created to classify rivers for desired usage and to designate local watershed organizations. The University of Rhode Island Watershed Watch program enlists and assists volunteers in monitoring the water quality of lakes, ponds, streams, and estuaries throughout the state. RIDEM created a Sustainable Watersheds Office and Watershed Partnership that has focused technical assistance on local groups, fostering watershed planning and management from “the ground up”. There are now seven watershed councils designated by the Rivers Council and numerous other citizen groups monitoring local watershed issues.

Most land surrounding surface and groundwater resources is privately held and therefore vulnerable to development and contamination. Land protection via acquisition and state and local development controls are the primary means of protecting drinking water. The Rhode Island Water Resources Board Corporate uses a surcharge on water delivered by larger suppliers to finance acquisition of land or interests in land that protect surface and groundwater. Since inception of the program, over 2,400 acres have been protected. Communities have addressed watershed and aquifer protection through various techniques. Some have enacted

local regulations such as aquifer overlay or wellhead protection zones or established special districts such as watershed or groundwater protection districts. All communities are also required to complete Source Water Assessment Plans by 2003 that will identify threats to public drinking water supplies. Over time, local protection measures should be strengthened, as ordinances are updated to include techniques to limit impervious surfaces, limit density, and prohibit contamination-threatening land uses within watershed and groundwater protection zones

Increasingly, water quantity has become a serious question, particularly in certain rapidly developing areas of the state. Drought conditions in 2001-2 led to development of a new State Guide Plan, the *Rhode Island Drought Management Plan*, adopted June 2002. Maintaining water quality and sufficient flow in streams to support aquatic life is a major concern in the allocation of available water during low flow periods.

### **Major Accomplishments**

- Two phases of the Water Resources Board's Watershed Protection Program have been completed. \$12.8 million in water surcharge proceeds, combined with other sources of funds in some cases, have been used to acquire land or easements on 2,420 acres to protect drinking water supply. Phase III, in 2003-2005, will make an additional \$7.44 million available for this purpose.
- In 1993, the General Assembly enacted legislation designating the Big River Management Area and as open space, and the Rhode Island Water Resources Board completed a Land Management Plan for the area in 1997. Although being held for future water supply development, limited recreational usage, consistent with the Management Plan, is currently allowed in the area.
- Original Legislation, adopted in 1994 requires major water suppliers to develop Water Supply System Management Plans (WSSMPs). Among other provisions, WSSMPs define watershed protection measures needed to safeguard public water supply watersheds and aquifers. Twenty-four of the twenty-eight major suppliers have submitted water supply management plans.
- The R.I. Rivers Council, created by the General Assembly in 1991, developed a *Rivers Classification and Policies Plan*, that was adopted as a State Guide Plan element in 1997. The plan identifies usage goals for all freshwater river segments in the state, and established a process for the State designation of local watershed councils. The Rivers Council has designated seven local watershed councils to date. In 2002, the General Assembly provided seed funding through the Council to allow designated local councils to undertake watershed protection activities.
- DEM has instituted a Sustainable Watersheds Office and Watershed Coordinating Council to provide a watershed approach to water resources planning and management and offer technical assistance to local governments and watershed organizations. Five Watershed Action plans have been developed by local watershed organizations with DEM support. In addition, the DEM Office has prepared the Scituate Watershed Study and the South County Design Manual as technical guidance for communities in critical water resource regions to utilize in developing local protection measures. Several other documents are in preparation, including a conservation development manual, and an urban design manual.

**Policy RCOS - 3:** *Protect water resources, including rivers, lakes, ponds, streams, and surrounding lands*

**Policy RCOS - 4:** *Protect surface and groundwater resource areas, critical watersheds and aquifer recharge areas*

**Action Agenda 2003-2008**

- Implement the Water Resources Board's Phase III watershed protection program in 2003-2005 with a target of acquiring 1,000 acres of land or easements. Continue coordination between DEM and the Water Resources Board on the acquisition and protection of public water supplies, to identify and encourage acquisitions that meet multiple land protection goals to the greatest degree possible.
- Complete revisions to RI Water Quality Regulations, and develop stream flow standards
- Use the Water Supply System Management Planning and Local Comprehensive Planning processes to continue to improve coordination between major water suppliers and municipalities regarding water supply facilities and watershed land management practices, including appropriate land uses for drinking water resource supplies (groundwater aquifers and surface reservoir watersheds).
- Define acceptable recreational uses of watersheds that will safeguard public water supply quality.
- Monitor implementation of the water supply management plans for all public water suppliers.
- Conduct an evaluation of the effectiveness of local land use regulations in protecting water resources.
- Continue the development of a water allocation program providing a means to balance water usage and water demand issues, including minimum streamflow requirements.
- Work to enforce the FERC run-of-the-river policy to protect aquatic resources, particularly through reviews of hydropower projects
- Continue the work of the Rhode Island Rivers Council and support to local watershed councils in protecting and restoring the state's rivers.
- Continue the restoration of urban waterways and strategies to improve water quality, habitat protection and encourage active and passive recreation use of waterways.
- Support the University of Rhode Island's Watershed Watch program.



## ***Wetlands and Floodplains***

Wetlands play a critical role in providing wildlife habitat, flood storage, purifying and maintaining groundwater supplies, and, under certain circumstances, can provide substantial recreational opportunities. These socially-valuable functions have been recognized in Rhode Island and federal law through regulatory programs and other measures designed to provide protection for wetlands. Despite efforts to protect them, the loss and degradation of wetlands continues to be an environmental issue of national and state significance, witnessed by continuing controversies surrounding initiatives to modify federal regulations.

Congress passed the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act (EWRA) of 1986, which authorized revenue sources to fund federal wetland acquisition programs (including the Land and Water Conservation Fund), and directed the federal Fish and Wildlife Service and each state to prepare Wetlands Priority Plans (as amendments to their State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans). These plans identify wetland types or areas to be given priority for protection through acquisition programs at both the national and state levels. Rhode Island's Wetlands Priority Plan was adopted and given approval by the National Park Service in 1988. It is updated and summarized in Appendix B of this edition of the Plan.

Rhode Island's wetlands protection regulations are administered by the Department of Environmental Management and the Coastal Resources Management Council and remain the primary vehicle for wetlands protection in the state.

Floodplains of rivers, streams, lakes, and the coastline absorb run-off and wave impacts, and buffer inland areas from storm and flood damage. Floodplain zones, however, have been prime commercial, industrial, and residential development areas. Floodplain development is exposed to flood risks, and it reduces the natural ability of floodplains to store water, increasing the severity of flooding downstream, even in areas where the flood plains are intact.

Floodplain development should be discouraged through regulatory channels and zoning. Floodplain acquisitions related to linear parks and greenways should continue to occur, and limited, nonstructural recreational development of floodplains should be considered if no alternatives exist.

## ***Major Accomplishments***

- Establishment of the Habitat Restoration Team, composed of members from several state and federal agencies, environmental groups, universities, and municipalities.
- Local Watershed Councils have completed five Watershed Action Plans, with one more in draft form.
- North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) funding has enabled the acquisition of approximately 1,500 acres of land having significant portions of wetland since 1997.

- The effectiveness of the freshwater wetlands program has been significantly enhanced by the adoption of the recommendations of the Wetlands Task Force. These include the 2002 amendments to the regulations establishing a wetlands mitigation hierarchy designed to achieve no net loss of wetlands. Other improvements include:
  - evaluating the presence of wetlands based on soil type
  - an intense technical assistance and outreach program that has significantly improved understanding of the regulations and has helped to improve the quality of applications
  - pre-permitting meetings early in the planning phases of projects to establish the limits of regulatory wetlands and provide wetlands avoidance and/or mitigation recommendations
  - streamlined permitting that has reduced process time by nearly half and reduced fees for beneficial projects.
  - a computerized data tracking and information management system for wetlands and septic system permits that can be accessed by applicants and members of the public as well as staff. DEM is integrating this system with its water quality certification process.
  - Coordinated review for ISDS applications for residences next to wetlands.
  - A memorandum of agreement between DEM and CRMC that clarifies the responsibilities of the two agencies regarding freshwater wetlands in the vicinity of the coast.
- DEM also implemented many of the recommendations of the Stormwater Management Task Force and the Individual Sewage Disposal Task Force that play a role in wetlands protections.
- Certain classes of water bodies, such as drinking water supplies, and individual ones that are designated for reasons such as containing critical habitat, were designated by DEM's Water Quality Regulations as *Special Resource Protection Waters* to receive protection for reasons in addition to meeting the highest water quality criteria.
- DEM is conducting a triennial review of the Water Quality Regulations to update the regulations.



**Policy RCOS - 5:** *Protect wetlands and floodplains to maintain their natural functions and to minimize damage from floods.*

### ***Action Agenda 2003-2008***

- Complete the statewide freshwater wetlands conservation plan to coordinate the wetland protection efforts of DEM's Fish and Wildlife Division, the Natural Heritage Program, Land Acquisition Program, Wetlands Regulatory Program, municipalities and nonprofit conservation organizations.
- Continue to provide both the freshwater and coastal wetland regulatory processes with adequate resources and professional staff to execute their protection mandates.
- Continue to provide technical assistance and educational outreach to the development community, and other interested parties on wetland avoidance and minimize development impacts in compliance with Freshwater Wetlands regulations.
- Use the Coastal Resources Management Council's saltwater wetland mitigation policy as a basis to develop clear guidance for how brownfields and historical sites are redeveloped.
- Encourage communities to adopt land management regulations for their floodplains that exceed the minimum requirements of the National Flood Insurance Program.
- Continue to protect floodplains through acquisition of linear parks and greenways.

### ***Islands and Coastal Areas***

For the past half century Rhode Island's coast has received more popular attention and been under greater pressure than any other area of the state. Residential (including second homes), commercial and recreational development has grown more rapidly within the coastal zone than in other areas of the state. In a dramatic change, the traditional summer colonies along the Rhode Island coast have become year-round neighborhoods. Although these areas still have significant numbers of second homes which are occupied seasonally and on weekends, and some of the commercial uses are open in the summer months only, in fact, these areas are now active to a considerable extent year round. With high demand for rental and student housing, many of the seasonal houses are also occupied.

Development of the tourist industry has also supported some major building in Rhode Island's coastal districts as old facilities were expanded and upgraded and new commercial facilities were built to accommodate the state's visitors, who also increasingly visit on a year-round basis.

Unfortunate characteristics of much of the new construction as compared to the original buildings and features in the coastal areas are the larger scale, and the size and materials used for public improvements. Winterizing the houses in these areas has sometimes required (and created a public demand for) significantly upgraded public infrastructure in the form of wider, paved roads, seawalls and bulkheads and extension of public water and sewer service to serve these new permanent neighborhoods. Also, in keeping with the property values in the coastal areas and widespread trends in construction, new and renovated residential and commercial properties in these areas have gotten larger and more elaborate.



Rhode Island's waterfront colonies and coast area is admired and cherished for its special places, known for their beautiful and fragile natural resources and historic building character. However, in spite of valiant efforts and some great success in conservation and historic preservation, overall, the balance between the natural and built environments in these coastal areas is precarious. The design and building of new features must be limited, of better quality and discretely located. Every effort must be made to protect the fragile natural resources from the impacts of over-development and seasonal over-use.



Rhode Island's islands are prized for the open space they provide, the recreational opportunities they offer and the diversity of wildlife they harbor. Our larger islands attract people desiring to live, work and play. Aquidneck, Conanicut (Jamestown), and Block Island all have experienced increased development and recreational visitation over the past decade. While growth has helped island economies, it has intensified the pressure on their limited natural resources, and threatens the characteristics that make the islands attractive in the first place. Even during slower economic times, the pressure to use and enjoy our coastal resources will remain strong.

While many of Rhode Island's coastal areas shelter plant and animal species whose habitat protection requires limiting public access, some areas continue to offer untapped recreational potential. Accommodating existing and new recreational usage of Rhode Island's island and coastal areas should continue, with the careful development of new public use opportunities, such as the recently-acquired Rome Point site on the West passage of Narragansett Bay. Balancing public use and safety, and resource protection is particularly important along the coast, and continuing efforts to maintain proper stewardship and protection standards is necessary. Opportunities to acquire coastal and island sites that are suitable for public access and recreational usage should be pursued by state and local agencies as consistent with applicable plans.

Islands and coastal areas are especially vulnerable to development, coastal storms and sea level rise. The Partnership for Narragansett Bay and the Coastal Institute are developing a plan to identify and prioritize sites for restoration.

### ***Major Accomplishments***

- Blueprint for Rhode Island's Coastal Habitat Restoration Opportunities and Accomplishments, published in 2000 by the State Habitat Restoration Team. Several restoration projects are underway.
- Pawcatuck River and Little Narragansett Bay: An Interstate Management Plan, published in 1992.
- Regulations Relating to Vehicle Use on Barrier Beaches updated by RI Coastal Management Council
- Narrow River: Special Area Management Plan, 1999



**Policy RCOS - 6:** *Protect significant island and coastal sites.*

**Action Agenda 2003-2008**

- Complete development of a coastal wetland protection and restoration plan coordinating efforts of CRMC, the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program, and partners.
- Continue to pursue shoreline and coastal land protection projects as opportunities arise which are consistent with the State Guide Plan and DEM's Land Acquisition Plan.
- Continue to emphasize the importance of local coastal acquisitions via the Open Project Selection process.
- Establish contingent priorities and procedures for the acquisition of storm damaged coastal properties as part of hurricane preparedness planning. Establish a dedicated accrual account for the purchase of storm-damaged properties, particularly barrier beaches and other flood prone areas.
- Assess the impacts associated with sea level rise, and address these impacts in permitting and project design decisions.
- Continue the restoration and maintenance of historic Fort Adams as a tourism and recreational resource.
- Expand public opportunities for small craft access and dockage along the coast, especially in Narragansett Bay
- Provide technical assistance to municipalities in preparing and updating local comprehensive plans, and in developing regulations that provide for the scale and design of development which is appropriate to the character of the natural and built environment and consistent with the vision stated in Comprehensive Community Plan.

**Forests**

Rhode Island's 400,000 acres of forests cover some 60% of the state, playing a significant role in its economy, environmental health, and lifestyle of its citizens. In the coming years, the role of forests in protecting water supplies, as places to recreate, and as components of urban environments will be increasingly important. The state's forests, however, have been in decline, a result of development, infrastructure improvements, land clearing, and pest infestations. In 1998, forests covered 393,000 acres or 59 percent of the land in Rhode Island, a decrease from 1985 when there were



411,800 acres of forest. The state's forests are also becoming more fragmented over time. Seventy-five percent of the state's forestland is privately owned, and, as land values and taxation increase, traditionally-held large tracts are being divided into more numerous, smaller parcels. Infestations have also taken a toll. During the past 100 years, gypsy moth, chestnut

blight, Dutch elm diseases, and more recently, hemlock woolly adelgid have attacked Rhode Island forests. Rhode Island forests, especially those in public ownership, are also under increasing pressure from those seeking dispersed outdoor recreational opportunities closer to home. Increased use combined with residential development within or on forest edges makes forest fire prevention and suppression increasingly important to protect property, even though controlled burning may benefit forest resources.

Two other State Guide Plan Elements directly and comprehensively address woodland and urban forest concerns. The (1984) *Rhode Island Forest Resources Management Plan (FRMP)* deals with many of these forest issues, and is a comprehensive plan addressing appropriate management and use of the state's extensive and productive forested areas. *The Rhode Island Urban and Community Forest Plan* (1999) complements the FRMP by providing policies and guidance on how forest resources can be effectively managed and enhanced as integral parts of the built environment.

Natural resource-based recreation opportunities such as hunting, snowmobiling, field trials, hiking, and camping are a traditional and important aspect of Rhode Island's out-of-doors life. The western forest lands and the extensive state-owned Management Areas provide year-round opportunities to enjoy a variety of recreational pursuits. The character these areas offer is as near to an unaltered forest environment as can be found in Rhode Island, and for some residents, perhaps the only exposure to "wilderness" they will encounter in their lives. The recreational experiences these forested areas accommodate, are special, and care must be taken to insure that they are not diminished by the insidious threats of overuse, resource degradation and pollution, and conflicting uses on lands surrounding the public estate.

### **Major Accomplishments**

- The RI Urban and Community Forest Plan was adopted as an element of the State Guide Plan in 1999, providing policies and guidance on the role of forests and trees in an urban state.
- The RI Tree Council, with support from DEM and the U.S. Forest Service, has developed a number of programs to promote and support the enhancement of forests within the built environment. Programs include Tree Stewardship education, tree planting grants, and
- DEM has enhanced the facilities at a number of woodland system Management Areas and Campgrounds. Accomplishments include:
  - completed designs for adding shower and restroom improvements at George Washington Campground
  - built a new restroom facility at Pulaski Recreation Area
  - completed repair of Bowdish dam on Bowdish Lake, Gloucester.
- The reactivated R.I. Trails Advisory Committee coordinates recreation activities related to trails. The Arcadia and Northwest Management Councils coordinate recreational special use permits to minimize conflicts between user groups.

- The respective management councils coordinated and worked with groups like the Boy Scouts, Appalachian Mountain Club, RI Mountain Biking Association, RI Field Trials Club, Narragansett Bay Sled Dog Club, RI Federated Riding Clubs, and motorcycle groups such as the RI Trails Club and Rhody Rovers to maintain trails and footbridges in State management areas. They worked with groups such as the Wood-Pawcatuck River Association on erosion control and cleanup on the Wood River.
- DEM pursued legislation to authorize creation of a DEM Parks & Forest Foundation to receive and disburse donations and partnership proceeds for direct investment in facilities and services.
- The Rural Lands Coalition, Southern New England Forest Consortium and R.I. Forest Landowners Association have been organized as effective advocates for public education on the values and benefits that forested land provides to the state and communities.
- DEM's alternative forest business project is helping forest landowners to keep their land in forest usage, and may create ideas for recreation such as leasing land for hunting and fishing, as well as user fees for other activities such as hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding.

**Policy RCOS -7:** *Conserve and enhance urban and community forests for multiple uses -- water supply and water quality, recreation, forest products, energy, and wildlife habitat – as fundamental to high quality woodland and urban environments.*

#### **Action Agenda 2003-2008**

- Continue to educate the public and landowners regarding sound forest management.
- Continue to work with landowners to maintain/expand markets for timber and non-timber products.
- Update the State Comprehensive Forest Management Plan (State Guide Plan Element 161), incorporating a multiple resource management approach.
- Continue to actively pursue the acquisition of fee title or conservation easements of large contiguous forested tracts, primarily those tracts in the western forested corridor, consistent with the State Guide Plan and DEM's Land Protection Plan.
- Maintain coordination through the State Conservation Committee to ensure that local tax structures for forest land recognize the reduced burden on local services by forest land and forestry and treat forest land equitably.
- DEM should continue to encourage forest management practices which facilitate economic returns for forest products without diminishing forest resources.
- Encourage and support the work of the R.I. Tree Council, R.I. Rural Lands Coalition, R.I. Forest Landowners Association, and Southern New England Forest Consortium to promote research and education programs that encourage the long-term protection and enhancement of Rhode Island urban and community forest resources.

## ***Agricultural Land***

Farming in Rhode Island is a \$141 million business (1996) and its future is dependent upon available and affordable farmland with high quality agricultural soil. Although Rhode Island farms enjoy the highest return per acre of any agricultural land in the nation, the State continues to lose farmland acres, a trend seen throughout New England. From 1964 to 1997, Rhode Island lost nearly half of its farmland, a decline from 103,800 to 55,300 acres. Between 1988 and 1995, the state lost approximately 1,500 acres of farmland. Between 1986 and 1996, the number of Rhode Island dairy farms was cut almost in half, from 58 to 30. Rhode Island's small dairy farm sector continues under severe economic pressures from large-scale competitors elsewhere in the nation, and low federal milk price supports.

High quality agricultural soils are distributed throughout the state, however, the majority of commercially productive agriculture occurs in Washington and Newport Counties, where turf, nursery stock and potatoes are the principal products. Vegetable and market farms are located closer to the metropolitan Providence region. Commercial orchards are located primarily in the northern part of the state, and dairy farms are distributed throughout the state.



Farmland provides a number of important benefits in addition to its contribution to the state's economy. It enhances, and affords Rhode Island residents the opportunity to purchase fresh, locally-grown produce. The traditional architecture and scenic character of our farmscapes provide variety and an aesthetic character for their communities and add to the quality of life. Moreover, land retained in farmland costs communities far less in community services than land developed for new residential use. Agricultural land preserved in proximity to other large protected areas stimulates a naturally occurring patchwork of woods and meadows to strengthen the state's natural diversity. Community gardens and volunteer-run community farms, such as one in Jamestown, provide opportunities for urban and suburban residents to experience the rigors of farming, while contributing to their food security. Some farmers are supplementing or replacing traditional farming activities by offering agricultural-related tours and activities on their farms. These include such things as cutting Christmas trees, picking apples and berries, hayrides, wine-tasting as well as participating in educational programs in the downtime between crops. Some farms also increase revenue by renting land and buildings for boarding and riding horses and communal gardens.

The time is long past when Rhode Island can take the continued existence of its farms for granted. As valuable as agricultural production is to the State's economy, farmers cannot afford to pay taxes based on residential and commercial development value of their land. The economics of farming simply will not support those higher land values. If farming is to continue as a significant feature of the Rhode Island landscape, it will be the result of positive actions that identify and protect agricultural soils, encourage agricultural production and treat the Rhode Island farmer as a critical state resource.

Among agencies cooperating to keeping working farms alive are DEM, the Agricultural Lands Preservation Commission, The US Department of Agriculture, and the RI Farm Bureau. Programs range from land preservation through purchase of development rights, web based and classroom education programs, farmers markets and alternative forest businesses. The Agricultural Lands Preservation Commission works with DEM to preserve agricultural lands through purchase of development rights.

### **Major Accomplishments**

- The updated (1992) State Zoning Enabling Act authorizes municipalities to zone land for agricultural use, and permits clustering of development and transfer of development rights.
- Rhode Island's Farm, Forest, & Open Space Law, originally passed in 1980 and amended in 1999, provides for farmland enrolled in the program to be assessed at its current value assessment, rather than "highest and best use". In 2000, a Subcommittee of the State Conservation Committee established recommended maximum current-use values for local tax officials to utilize.
- DEM's Agriculture Division actively supports the marketing of Rhode Island grown produce via publications, a website, and various promotions. Information is provided on Farmer's Markets, Christmas Tree Farms, Honey and Maple Syrup Producers, Pick Your Own Berries, Pick Your Own Apples & Cider Mills, and Roadside Stands. Rhode Island's farmers make the most revenue from direct marketing of any state in the country.
- DEM supports four farmers markets at state Parks, provided assistance to two community farms in 2002 and expects to assist three to five in 2003. DEM bought Ring Rose Farm and transferred it to the South Side Community Land Trust for use as a mentor farm targeted to urban residents, many of whom are immigrants.

**Policy RCOS- 8:** *Support agricultural uses and preserve the best farmland for active agricultural purposes .*

### **Action Agenda: 2003-2008**

- The Agricultural Lands Preservation Commission should continue to protect farmland with legal and technical staff support from the Department of Environmental Management. The Purchase of Development Rights program should focus on farms that are economically viable and comprised of the best agricultural soils.
- Continue funding support for the Agricultural Lands Preservation Commission's Purchase of Development Rights Program through periodic State bond referenda, federal grants, or other means.
- The State Conservation Committee and DEM should continue to encourage and cooperate with local officials in implementing a property tax structure for qualified agricultural lands that recognizes the reduced burden on local services by farms and farming and that treats the taxation of agricultural land equitably.

- The Agricultural Land Preservation Commission and DEM should promote the concept of community-supported agriculture as a way to involve the public in agricultural land protection, and to maintain the continuity of agricultural operations where family members are not interested in farming and a successor commercial operator cannot be found.
- Continue to work with the Agricultural Land Preservation Commission to maintain and expand protection of working farms through purchase of development rights and the Farm Viability Program.
- Work with the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the Rhode Island Center for Commercial Agriculture to develop and implement an agricultural web page for Rhode Island
- Work with the Rhode Island Farm Bureau to assist the Agriculture In The Classroom program to educate schoolchildren on the importance of agriculture
- Explore the feasibility of a permanent, year-round farmers market in Rhode Island.
- Explore opportunities to develop and promote community-supported agriculture/community gardening in urban areas.

### ***Fish and Wildlife***

Rhode Island's woodlands, fields, lakes, streams, marshes, and coastal waters harbor over 435 species of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, and amphibians. The state's wildlife provides a variety of ecological, recreational, economic, and aesthetic benefits.

Hunting remains a popular recreational activity of Rhode Islanders. Game species have traditionally been managed through state and federally-funded research, habitat acquisition and improvement and species reintroductions. These programs should continue. Fishing and shell fishing also are important to many residents and visitors, and efforts to reduce development impacts and non-point pollution of our waters and wetlands must continue.

The status of fish and wildlife resources is mixed. On the one hand, populations of species such as turkey vulture, fisher, and osprey have increased to sustainable numbers. Problems continue with overabundant species such as mute swans, geese, and white tail deer despite management efforts.

The populations of some marine fish species are up, while others are down. A sharp decline in bottom-dwelling fish and a steep increase in off-bottom species and lobster may be reversing. In general, shellfish and crab abundance have risen, but quahogs have declined. Over-fishing and habitat alteration have done significant harm to important commercial and recreational species such as winter flounder that spend their entire life cycle in Narragansett Bay. In addition to regulating fishing levels, DEM is examining whether habitat can be improved to increase winter flounder and other resident species. The state is continuing efforts to restore anadromous fisheries such as Atlantic Salmon and herring through construction of fish ways and stocking. Freshwater fish stocking programs support a "put and take" fishery that provides the public with recreational enjoyment and a source of fish that is not contaminated, important in some urban streams where elevated mercury levels in native fish are a concern.

Rhode Island must continue to use a multi-faceted approach to protect and maintain the state's fish and wildlife populations at optimum levels. These include ongoing research, management and education efforts, habitat protection and improvement and the prevention or mitigation of activities which have a significant negative impact upon fish and wildlife.

**Major Accomplishments:**

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Rhode Island refuges were expanded by 732 acres, with additions to Trustum Pond, Pettaquamscutt River (now John H. Chafee), Ninigret, and Block Island National Wildlife Refuges.
- DEM conducted a variety of education programs to foster a greater awareness and appreciation of the state's wildlife resources. The Aquatic Education Program offered teacher workshops, ecology programs, recreational training programs, and family presentations.
- Continued research to document and monitor fish and wildlife populations and habitats in the state included:
  - Sampling ponds and streams for types and numbers of fish.
  - Radio tagging ruffed grouse to determine movement and mortality.
  - Marine fisheries: monthly sampling at 12 trawl stations, 4 coastal ponds, 18 shore seine stations in Narragansett Bay, fixed stations in the Bay with gillnets and bi-monthly sampling at 26 trawl stations.
  - Monitoring waterfowl breeding activities, upland game bird, big game, and furbearer population dynamics.
  - Monitoring all Piping Plover nesting sites
  - Restoring 10 acres/year of habitat for American Burying Beetle
  - Surveying 65 colony nesting bird sites

**Policy RCOS - 9:** *Protect and maintain fish and wildlife populations at optimum levels and provide opportunities for wildlife-based recreation.*

**Action Agenda 2003-2008**

- Through DEM's Division of Fish and Wildlife, continue education programs to foster awareness and appreciation of the state's wildlife resources.
- Continue to maintain and expand, where feasible, areas and facilities providing opportunities for fishing, hunting and other wildlife-based recreational pursuits.
- Develop a wildlife center with improved office, lab and classroom facilities at the Great Swamp.

- Complete the project to restore anadromous fish to the Ten Mile River.
- Install fishways on the Ten Mile, Blackstone, and Pawcatuck Rivers to restore anadromous fisheries.
- Continue mink/mercury sampling and expand program to include other fish-eating species such as river otter, fisher and osprey.
- Continue surveillance and control initiatives for Chronic Wasting Disease (neurological disease of deer and elk)
- Control Canada goose population through limiting the seasons for hunting permits and control populations of Mute Swans through egg addling.
- Continue study of amphibian species to develop stronger conservation recommendations.
- Continue monitoring selected avian species such as Piping Plover, Least Tern, osprey, Snowy and Little Blue Egrets, ibis, Common Tern, double-crested cormorants, and others to assess population levels.
- Continue monitoring and efforts to protect and expand population levels of Federal Endangered Species such as the American Burying Beetle and Sandplain Gerardia.

### ***Cultural Resources***

Rhode Island has a remarkable legacy of sites and buildings of historic, architectural or archeological importance; in fact, we may have the greatest concentration of these resources in the country. More than 12,500 Rhode Island properties are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as individual sites and districts which are recognized as having local, state or national significance. The Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission (RIHPHC), a state agency, orchestrates statewide identification and protection efforts.

Historic resources are integral to Rhode Islanders' daily living and working experiences, as well as to outdoor recreation. The character and context of many of our neighborhoods, city and village urban centers, as well as our rural and waterfront areas are created by historic features. Many of our state and local parks contain historic features and historic areas are among our favorites places to visit for our most popular outdoor activities -- walking, riding a bike or sightseeing in a car, as well as visiting historic museums and participating at public festivals.

Many state and municipally-owned properties are historic, associated with the most important persons and events of our past public life. They are also architecturally important, beautiful landmarks in prime locations and real centerpieces in the life of our state and communities. Some of the most significant historic buildings and sites in Rhode Island are owned and maintained by historic societies, churches, and other not-for-profit and preservation groups. However, the vast majority are privately-owned and maintained.



Historic preservationists have effectively joined forces with others concerned with environmental protection and community design. Together they are focusing on whole areas of important resources, historic complexes such as mill complexes and villages, the buildings and landscapes of our great estates, historic districts in cities and villages.

Two particularly endangered categories that are receiving current attention are historic landscapes and shipwrecks in state waters. Also, Rhode Island has many outstanding examples of restoration and re-use of historic mill buildings undertaken in conjunction with brownfield remediation projects. Mill-built housing and working-class neighborhoods of historic three-deckers have increasingly been restored under publicly-directed affordable housing programs using tax credits.

Rhode Island has enacted some of the strongest tax incentives for historic preservation in the country and the State Building Code was amended in 2002 to address specialized issues of renovation within historic commercial structures.

Restoration and maintenance of the historic building stock is an enormous challenge. Funding for protection, conservation, curation, and interpretation remains a patchwork at best with many sources and a far greater need than supply. The incentives provided by tax act credits for commercial properties has been the single most effective means of restoring our historic stock. However, this is a constant endeavor, especially considering the wear and tear many of our wooden historic structures have experienced. The character of our special places depends upon our continuing with this work.

***Major Accomplishments:***

- Since the 1980's, land conservation and historic preservation organizations have joined forces and developed new initiatives. The Blackstone River State Park, and the Woonasquatucket River Watershed brochure with their emphasis on historic preservation and interpretation are examples of these initiatives.
- There is a growing recognition in public and private sectors that the "sprawl" pattern of development typical of the past few decades has negative impacts on the environment and can be detrimental to the traditional character of communities. Groups such as Grow Smart Rhode Island have brought public attention to development issues, reinforcing efforts that began with the comprehensive revision of local planning, subdivision and zoning legislation in the early 1990s, to preserve and enhance community character by encouraging new development to be more compact, located in traditional centers, and compatible with sensitive features and the character of the community.
- State bond funds administered by the RIHPHC have assisted 376 historic preservation projects with some \$5.9 million, and the now-defunct Roger Williams Reserve Fund (funded through hotel tax revenues, but repealed in 1997) funded renovations of four historic properties of statewide significance.
- The RI-HPHC Historic Preservation Loan Fund has been created with \$3.5 million.

- In 2002 the state passed a \$14 million Heritage Bond issue that includes \$3 million to fund a grant program operated by the R.I. Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission to support capital preservation projects at museums and cultural art centers located in historic properties. Other components of the bond include \$3 million to fund construction of the Roger Williams Park Botanical Gardens; \$5 million to fund construction of Heritage Harbor Museum; and \$3 million to fund construction of the Pawtuxet River Walkway in West Warwick.
- The Cranston Street Armory and Dexter Parade ground in Providence were refurbished with \$5 million in state funds, \$700,000 in federal funds, along with \$75,000 in private and foundation funding for playground improvements and extensive tree planting by the city and by Narragansett Electric company. The former Center General Hospital building at the Pastore Center that is now occupied by the Department of Labor and Training was completely rehabilitated.
- Fort Adams – the largest coastal fortification in the US - renovations of the outside of the fort were completed, as well as site cleanup by the Army Corps of Engineers and handicapped accessibility improvements
- In Fort Wetherill in Jamestown, a new marine fisheries lab opened in 2002, re-using a derelict building for a fisheries laboratory to improve the resource for sport and commercial fishing, including improved public access to parking, restroom facilities and fishing.
- The Kelly House in Blackstone River State Park was refurbished to accommodate the Transportation and Industrial Museum.



**Policy RCOS - 10:** *Preserve significant historic, architectural and archeological sites, buildings and districts.*

**Action Agenda 2003-2008:**

- Approximately 2,500 additional properties have been identified as potentially eligible for listing on the National Register (13,000 have been documented and nominated) but these need to be researched and nominated. The Commission aims to nominate ten percent of the potential 2,500 nominees annually.
- Investigate the feasibility of establishing an underwater trail with an historic shipwreck in an easily-accessible and monitored area.
- Adopt legislation for additional funding to the Historic Preservation Revolving Fund to maintain an adequate loan reserve, and provide grant funding for projects where loans are not appropriate.

- Initiate a state matching grant-in-aid program based on regular appropriations for work on endangered historic properties.
- Integrate provisions for funding the restoration/maintenance of publicly-owned historic properties into regular state and local budget mechanisms.

### **Scenic Resources**

Rhode Island retains a remarkable legacy of unique natural landscapes, seascapes and scenic roads despite losses and degradation of the visual character from new development and highway construction over the years. The State's Scenic Roadway Board has officially designated limited stretches of eight roads as scenic roads, helping to preserve their character through recognition and through review procedures to avoid publicly-funded improvements which would be detrimental. However, the Scenic Highways Board does not provide funds for road improvements which are designed to preserve scenic elements.

There is a growing awareness of the importance to a community of visual access to important vistas from the public rights of way (usually public roads). However, visual access through easements or land use regulation is generally rare in Rhode Island. It has been used in the design of private communities in the region but is not yet included in municipal land use regulations. The siting, mass and design of new building within important built and natural environments and in proximity to important vistas, is critical in the preservation – and the enhancement—of the area's character and the public's enjoyment of the resources.



Greenspace and greenways along our major roads needs to be recognized for the importance of aesthetic and functional roles. For example, although it is taken for granted, the parkway character of Route 1 along the coast in South County, enjoyed by countless residents and tourists on their journeys, is largely due to small, state-owned, wooded parcels – vestiges of past highway alignments -- which still line the corridor. The importance of such (seemingly insignificant) greenspace to the character of public places that are major parts of our everyday experience can be easily under-estimated, until it is gone.

Similarly, the value of breath-taking views of beautiful landscapes and seascapes can not be calculated and is an important experience for all of us to be able to continue to enjoy. Identification of these important public resources – critical greenspace and views—are appropriate, in fact, essential aspects of state and local planning and land use controls. They are worthy subjects for special studies as part of the Community Comprehensive Plans, analysis of special district analysis and, after appropriate documentation, for inclusion in urban design and zoning regulations. Most local land use planning and zoning does not adequately address the impacts of development on aesthetic or historical resources. As local comprehensive plans and revised zoning codes are prepared, communities should be encouraged to consider actions aimed at maintaining and enhancing their scenic character and landscapes.

### **Major Accomplishments:**

- The RIHPHC completed the inventory of designed and evolved vernacular landscapes and published “Historic Landscapes of Rhode Island” in 2001, which discusses issues, threats, and opportunities.
- The Scenic Roadways Board has designated eight roads as scenic roads, five of those in the last ten years. A number of communities have adopted scenic road ordinances. State legislation passed in 1999 requires municipalities to notify residents along roads to be designated as scenic of the town’s intention

**Policy RCOS – 11:** *Protect scenic areas and resources including landscapes, roadways, and views of the waterfront and significant geologic features.*

### **Action Agenda 2003-2008:**

- State and municipal planners should coordinate efforts to identify and permanently protect key publicly owned property, including undeveloped greenspace or important built features which contribute scenic and aesthetic value to state and municipal roadways. The impact upon scenic values and community character should be fully considered prior to disposal or re-use of publicly-owned greenspace adjoining public roads.
- A scenic and design aesthetic should be the goal for all public right-of-ways, and especially for roads possessing scenic character. Context sensitive design principles should apply to ensure that new and re-built highways and roadways fit with their surrounding communities. A design treatment of highways as parkways and major streets as boulevards, with significant vegetated buffers and parallel tracks for pedestrians and bicycles, wherever feasible, should be considered.
- Local land-use regulations should provide for appropriate setbacks for construction and limit defoliation within scenic roadway corridors. Strong signage controls, including efforts to eradicate billboards should be implemented. Displays of equipment, signage and location of buildings immediately adjacent to the road right-of-way line should be prohibited (at least discouraged) through combined state and local efforts.
- The Scenic Roadways Board should explore the possibility of providing funding for acquiring easements to maintain the key elements of scenic roadway corridors.
- Municipal planners should be encouraged to consider scenic vista protection, especially of important water views from public vantage points. Efforts should include identification of key vistas and greenspace resources in public plans, consideration of size and siting of new buildings, and adoption of zoning or special district regulations to control for appropriate new design.
- Encourage and assist municipal planners in scenic landscape protection. Use techniques such as three-dimensional build-out analysis of their current zoning to assess the potential impact of current dimensional requirements on important views, landscapes and other resources.

- Encourage landowners to maintain scenic views across their private land via the use of a registry program and visual access easements.
- Provide funding to the RIHPHC to list eligible landscapes on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, and expand the easement program to provide protection for qualifying landscapes, as well as to conduct historical and archaeological surveys, protect, conserve, curate and interpret resources.

#### **4-3 Meeting Critical Needs...Improve Recreation Opportunities and Resource Conservation**

##### **Goal 2: Rhode Island will improve its system of outdoor recreation facilities and conservation areas to meet the needs of its residents and visitors.**

While provision of outdoor recreation is not explicitly cited as a purpose for our federal government, most contemporary interpretations of the social contract support governmental action to address the public's need and desires for enjoyment of the outdoor environment as part of its "promotion of the general welfare". In Rhode Island the directive is even clearer: Article 37 of the State Constitution states that... *"The people shall... be secure in their rights to the use and enjoyment of the natural resources of the state..."* Clearly, this plan sees the ability to access and enjoy the outdoors and engage in recreational pursuits as an essential aspect of community life which Rhode Island governments have a legitimate and continuing responsibility to provide for.

*The following general principles are recommended to guide the actions outlined later in this section for meeting specific outdoor recreational needs:*

- 1) *Provision of sufficient land and adequate facilities for public outdoor recreation must remain a **constant** objective of state and local governments.*

A **"green as we grow"** concept must apply to the maintenance and expansion of Rhode Island's greenspace and recreational system capital (land and facilities) if the outdoor recreation needs of present and future Rhode Islanders and visitors to the state are to be successfully meet. The neglect of recreation system investments during the late 1970s and early 1980s contributed directly to an "open space crisis" experienced in the mid-80s, as development burgeoned throughout the state, and led to costly remedial programs in the late 1980s. Such a scenario was avoided during the development boom of the late 90s through the regular, prudent investments made in the system during the 90s. A reoccurrence should be avoided in the future by a scheduled program of investments in improved and expanded recreational facilities and open space areas.

This advice is particularly directed to rural and lesser-developed suburban communities that face growth pressures now and in the future. More than any other area of the state, their development strategies can benefit from the **"green as you grow"** approach, linking reservation of important open spaces and provision of adequate recreation facilities to population growth and land development. Such communities should be striving to provide a balanced active and passive recreation/open space system that meets, *or preferably exceeds*, national and state standards as they grow.

This recommendation also implies that the State should continue its partnership with localities in recreational system expansion and development. The State's recreation and open space grant-in-aid programs supported by bond referenda in 1987, 1989, 1997, and 2000 have been instrumental in meeting outdoor recreation needs in virtually all the state's municipalities. Moreover, the 50/50 cost-sharing arrangement has stimulated local governments to meet their responsibility for their recreation capital investments as well. Continuation of this investment program, on a sustainable basis should be an important goal.

- 2) *Highest priority for State recreation system investments should be given to areas and facilities which allow the greatest number of Rhode Islanders to access, enjoy and understand the outdoor environment.*

State investments in recreation should strive to improve the accessibility of recreation to the public, particularly to residents of urban areas having the fewest existing opportunities; provide the facilities desired by the public; and build towards an interconnected network of recreation areas and open spaces.

Proximity of facilities to heavily populated areas should be given significant consideration, given the proclivity for close-to-home recreation and the distributional differences observable in facility/population ratios. Investments which improve the availability of recreational opportunities to urban residents, and improve the distributional equity of the overall facility inventory should be given high priority.

As stressed earlier, greenways and similar linear recreation facilities can weave recreational opportunities and open space into the fabric of populated communities, and play an important role in improving the accessibility of recreation. Riverways, bikeways, and other greenways link isolated sites together and make them greater than the sum of their parts. Facilities such as the Blackstone River Park and the East Bay Bikeway are already demonstrating the potential of this approach, and high priority should be given to replicating their success in other areas of the state, as is recommended by the Greenspace and Greenways system goal stated earlier.

Public demands for different types of recreation and the severity of facility deficits for different activities should be an additional factor in investment priorities. In terms of total demand, estimated from the 2002 Public Survey, the five top activities are: walking, pleasure driving, visiting coastal areas, nature watching, and bicycling. These are largely consonant with the top five "needs" expressed in the statewide public survey, which were for walking and biking trails, natural areas, picnic facilities, saltwater beaches, and historical sites and museums. Provision or enhancement of facilities addressing these high demand and high desire activities, should be accorded priority via direct State projects, and via the State's recreation grant program, when a need relative to supply is demonstrated. Similarly, local projects that address the top needs identified by local managers for neighborhood and community-based activities -- namely skate parks/BMX, soccer/lacrosse, pools/swimming facilities, multi-use fields, and trails -- should also receive priority provided that, taking account of available supply, a local need is well-documented. The public sector, however, can not and should not assume responsibility for meeting all facility needs. The private sector has a significant role to play in meeting deficits for a number of activities, including golf, horseback riding, and boating.



Finally, State-provided areas and facilities should, in general, be kept as minimal and simple as possible; both to respect the natural features of their (often fragile) sites, and to minimize maintenance and operation costs. This goal can be accomplished in most instances by providing only basic user support facilities such as parking, restrooms, trails and walkways, interpretative centers and signage, and multi-purpose fields. Single-purpose, or highly specialized recreation facilities should, in general, be avoided in State parks.

- 3) *Rhode Island must capture every opportunity to realize the recreation and open space opportunities inherent in public and private investment projects which structure the environment.*

It is not only prudent planning to incorporate open space and recreation into the "built environment" as it is being created; it is also much easier and more cost-effective than remedial approaches. The recreation demand data tell us that most Rhode Islanders manage to weave growing amounts of recreation and leisure activities into their complicated mix of work, home, and social responsibilities. The high level of public demand for such basic recreation as walking and bicycling is indicative of this phenomenon, in that these activities are readily accessible and combinable with other functions of daily life, such as going to the store. This argues for a public policy which consciously integrates opportunities for enjoyment of the outdoors in all projects which create or structure our everyday living and working environment.

Development projects, both public and private, create opportunities for integrating recreation and open space opportunities close to the locales where we live and work. Facilities such as commercial centers, office plazas, industrial parks, and our transportation systems consume vast quantities of land, and are places where we spend significant portions of our lives, but are too often designed and built without careful consideration of how they should relate to the landscape, or of the leisure and recreation opportunities they could offer to the community. (A simple example would be designing stormwater detention facilities so that they constitute environmental amenities, offering a pastoral setting for recreation and ice-skating in winter, rather than being single-purpose, riprap-lined, nuisances which often are fenced-in).

In like vein, our communities can be designed either to require further dependency upon the automobile, or to entice us to select the healthier alternatives of walking or bicycling whenever possible. Goal 1 of this plan offers a vision of the benefits that a statewide network of greenspace and greenways could offer. An intricate network of protected open space would do more than tie together parks and preserves. Cutting across town lines, and connecting widely separate resource and recreation areas, such a system would reinforce the links between the city and the countryside, unite and revitalize communities, and guide growth away from fragile habitats, scenic areas, and floodplains. Through inclusion of bikepaths and trails, the greenway network would offer a supplemental transportation system offering alternatives to reduce reliance upon auto travel, increase walking and bicycling, and bolster healthier lifestyles. The huge popularity and success of the (still unconnected) Blackstone, East Bay, South County, and Washington Bikepaths offers just a hint of how beneficial a fully implemented and interconnected statewide greenway/bikeway system could be for Rhode Island's future, serving recreation and transportation needs alike.



Such ideas, while imminently sensible and well received in concept, are often difficult in execution. However, they are worth the time and effort to pursue. For if, through inattention to design, or for "economy", we allow our neighborhoods, public places, and roadways to be built or rebuilt as unaesthetic and uninviting places to walk, to sit, to bicycle; we will face the added, unnecessary task and expense of buying and building alternative sites and facilities with which to satisfy the public's demand for outdoor activities.

Outdoor recreation requires a setting in which to occur. The setting can consist of natural resources, man-built environments and facilities, or both. Settings are important, however, because the parameters of each recreational setting--its characteristics, capabilities and capacity--often are the sole determinants of whether the recreational experience will be rewarding or disappointing for participants. Anyone who has driven to the beach on the hottest day in July only to find no parking available understands the fundamentals of this dependency upon setting.

The needs, problems and issues associated with Rhode Island's major recreational settings, and with the activities which commonly occur within them are examined in this section of Part Four.

### ***A Diverse, Balanced System***

The current system supplies a wide variety of publicly-accessible opportunities for recreation within the natural and built environments of Rhode Island. This is a public system and we must strive to insure that it includes some opportunities for everyone. As keepers of this public system, it is our responsibility, furthermore, to press for opportunities and improvements especially for those for whom access to the system may be more difficult.

The need for the system to offer diversity in facilities and services to meet the needs of a growing and ever-changing population is constant. More than 50% of households surveyed in 2002 expressed a need for paved paths for biking and walking, natural areas/wildlife habitats, picnic shelters/areas, salt water beaches, and historical sites and museums, and outdoor areas for festival/special events, but only slightly lower percentages (in the 40s) indicated they also used freshwater beaches, nature education centers, larger parks, and playgrounds as well, indicating that a variety of facility choices need to be provided.

Yet, for nearly 20 years the top activities in terms of total demand have basically stayed the same – walking and bicycling, pleasure driving, picnicking, and beach use and swimming are always near the top of Rhode Islanders' lists, for understandable reasons, and these account for over 40 percent of the estimated total 2002 annual recreational participation in Rhode Island. However, despite the significant addition and renovation of recreational facilities through the past two decades, local system managers continue to report user conflicts and overcrowding, particularly in urban areas on the weekends and at active recreation and team sports facilities.

Most state and local sources report a need for additional recreational opportunities and, in most cases, such expansion will require more land. There is a need to expand the quantity of land and water within the public domain available for recreation at both the state and local level. In light of current development pressures, it is advisable to secure public land and water areas for present and future recreation needs



Rhode Island municipalities all prepared and adopted Community Comprehensive Plans in the early 90's and, at that time, the plans reported a collective need to expand local recreation system by approximately 2,000 acres statewide to meet nationally-accepted service standards. This estimate addressed only formal component of community recreation systems such as playfields and parks and not land protected for natural or cultural resources as in the greenspace system. While a re-calculation of acreage needs was not performed for this Plan update, it is safe to say that it is probably still significant.

Municipal recreation facilities are under considerable and growing pressures and coordination and creativity are needed to maximize use of local facilities by school programs, league sports and the general public. Multiple-use facilities and sharing of facilities are trends well-underway and they must continue. We must provide more open space, recreation facilities and linkages to the state open space and recreation system for urban residents. We must encourage recreation projects that integrate a variety of opportunities and a mixture of age groups and degree of physical abilities

**Policy RCOS - 12** *Provide a diverse, balanced system offering quality recreational opportunities that meet users needs*

**Action Agenda 2003 – 2008**

- Implement the DEM Asset Management Plans for facility maintenance and repairs
- Rehabilitate the facilities at East Matunuck State Beach
- Acquire and develop new coastal sites for campgrounds
- Develop a limited parking area at Rome Point.
- Maintain the Narragansett Bay Islands as wildlife management and low impact recreation areas
- Give priority to recreational projects that meet documented needs and foster a diverse and balanced recreation system.



## ***Public Access to the Shoreline***

The R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) is charged with protecting the public's right to access to the shore. One CRMC program designates public rights of way and installs permanent markers to identify them, however, limited funding has slowed progress under this effort. In order to achieve more and better-designed public access to the water, State agencies and local planning and conservation officials should coordinate in several ways. Coastal communities can adopt guidelines and regulations furthering shoreline access to complement state efforts. Local Comprehensive Plans should proactively identify general shoreline areas where more public access is desirable. At the earliest stages of planning for new projects along the waterfront, the best opportunities must be investigated for inclusion of public access so that it will be integral to the development plan. This is appropriate whenever commercial, residential and public spaces are planned. It is imperative to advance this initiative now since the coming years will only bring increasing pressure to develop shoreline areas.

The State can also expand and enhance shoreline access by acquiring and developing key access points and coordinating the improvement and expansion of facilities where the state or quasi-state or not-for-profit groups own waterfront properties. Continuing, aggressive advocacy and defense of the public's rights to the shore under the Public Trust Doctrine and the State Constitution is a State responsibility necessary to maintain the legal foundation underpinning aspects of coastal public access.

### ***Major Accomplishments***

- DEM acquired coastal properties that provide public recreational opportunities, notably the 231 acre John H. Chafee Nature Preserve at Rome Point, a donation from the Narragansett Electric Company.
- The guide *Public Access to the Rhode Island Coast: A Selective Guide to Parks, Refuges, Beaches, Fishing Sites, Boat Ramps, Pathways and Views along Rhode Island's Coast* was published in 1993 by URI's Coastal Resources Center and the Coastal Resources Management Council, and an updated version is in progress. The public access sites have been digitized and mapped using GPS and GIS to make future updates easier.
- DEM provided public access to Black Point in Narragansett and regained control of about 20 acres of public land at Weekapaug Breachway, in Westerly, providing parking, fishing and beach access to the public.
- Municipalities worked with CRMC to protect rights of ways to the shore and to encourage the incorporation of shore access points into new developments.
- The State worked with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, NOAA, municipalities, land trusts and private groups to protect significant properties within coastal and island Greenspace/Greenway areas.
- Designation of Public Right-of-Ways to the Tidal Areas of the State, -- a report on CRMC's research and designation process, was published by CRMC in 1998.
- Guidelines for the Development of Municipal Harbor Management Plans, was published by CRMC in 1998. An element of harbor management plans is the identification of coastal access sites, and mooring fields for recreational boats.

**Policy RCOS- 13:**    *Preserve and expand public access to the shoreline*

***Action Agenda 2003-2008***

- Revitalize the Coastal Resources Management Council's Shoreline Access Program.
- Update and republish the guide *Public Access to the Rhode Island Coast*.
- Utilize indestructible markers to identify public access points.
- Encourage local acquisition of coastal lands to stem the loss of traditional water dependent uses along the coast.
- Encourage municipalities to enact land use controls to protect, and expand local working waterfronts and public access points and enhance them with appropriate design.
- Investigate the feasibility of a water trail to the Narragansett Bay Islands with linkage to water transportation.
- Identify coastal sites for acquisition based on recreation potential, ecological function and public access.
- Require municipalities to address coastal public access in the recreation and open space elements of community comprehensive plans.
- Assist municipalities in developing guidelines for the development of public access to the water to be used in local planning and land use regulations
- Require coastal land-owning public and quasi-public agencies, to assess the public access potential of lands under their control.

***Saltwater Beaches***

Rhode Island's saltwater beaches are the state's most popular and heavily used recreational resources. While most of the people using the beaches are Rhode Island residents, the beaches are a regional attraction. The intense demand for beach use and the popularity of the state beaches have supported significant improvements to DEM's coastal facilities over the past 15 years.

The State Beaches have intensively developed infrastructures designed to handle large numbers of people for relatively short periods of time during the summer months. These facilities are located in exposed coastal areas that require significant annual maintenance. With the complete acquisition of major additions to Scarborough Beach and the numerous other state and local beaches that extend along the Atlantic Coast from Westerly to Little Compton, there should be no further need for the DEM to acquire southern coastal beach areas for public bathing facilities. Major renovations have been completed to State Beach facilities at Misquamicut, Scarborough and Block Island.

Municipalities, sometimes assisted by not-for-profit partners, have also made significant acquisitions of saltwater beachfront property for public recreation purposes during the past two decades. These community-based efforts should continue, when and if important waterfront properties become available. These acquisitions are funded primarily through the state's recreation grant programs.

At the local level, land use controls should seek to restrict shoreline development, especially where public recreational access will be reduced. In the Providence metropolitan area, water quality improvements in upper Narragansett Bay will hopefully lead to conditions allowing re-opening of bathing beaches.

### ***Major Accomplishments***

- Scarborough and Scarborough South State Beaches were redesigned and reconstructed as a consolidated modern facility.
- Facilities at Misquamicut and Roger C. Wheeler State Beachs were reconstructed.
- Facilities at Narragansett Town Beach, Easton's Beach (Newport), and several smaller community beaches were upgraded or re-built.

**Policy RCOS – 14:** *Improve and expand opportunities for recreational use of saltwater beaches*

### **Action Items 2003-2008**

- Renovate the facilities at East Matunuck State Beach.
- Consider allowing contained campers for overnight stays at Scarborough South and Misquamicut State Beaches.
- Continue and promote public transit service to the state beaches.
- Support all community-based efforts which would acquire saltwater beachfront, develop public recreation facilities, extend hours of operations, serve specialized populations, encourage alternative modes of transportation.

### ***Recreational Boating***

Recreational boating is among the most popular uses of the state's fresh and salt waters. Combining figures from the 2002 Public Survey for motorboating, sailboating, and canoeing/kayaking; the total participation in recreational boating placed tenth highest (out of 26) activities in terms of total demand.

Long an international center of boat building and yacht racing, recreational boating is an industry in Rhode Island. Boat-related activities and services continue to play a major role in the state's recreational, tourist, and manufacturing economy.

Sailboats, motorized craft, canoes, kayaks, and windsurfers use coastal waters even through the coldest months. More than 100 boating-related events ranging from weekly club regattas to major ocean races starts are held in our coastal waters.

Increased boat traffic has heightened safety concerns, particularly with regard to operating while under the influence of alcohol and lack of knowledge of boating safety practices. The State enacted two laws in 2001 to address both issues. The first sets alcohol limits and penalties similar to the driving while intoxicated standards and requires the same levels of testing. The second requires those born after 1985 who operate a boat with a motor greater than 10 horsepower to complete a boating safety course. DEM and the Coast Guard Auxiliary provide boating safety courses in English and Spanish. DEM also promotes the use of life jackets through education and outreach.



The popularity of boating stresses the resources, services, and facilities which support this activity, especially in salt water areas. As with other recreational activities, there is an unequal distribution of boating opportunities for Rhode Islanders to enjoy, resulting in the overcrowding of popular areas while others are rarely used.

Recreational boating will remain one of the state's most popular and profitable recreational pastimes. Relatively minor actions can result in greatly enhanced opportunities for boaters and we must continue the commitment to maintain and enhance this very special aspect of recreation.

### ***Major Accomplishments***

- In 1999 DEM initiated improved boat registration with two-year registrations and registration at boat shows and in 2002 initiated online boat registration, making it far easier to register a boat.
- Enactment of the boating while-under-the-influence law in 2001 has increased boating safety.
- Many new boat ramps have been constructed and existing ones re-constructed to improve and expand access, and the installation of ground-out piers have made it far easier to get to boats.
- More access sites, such as the Blackstone River State Park parking area, have been developed for canoes and kayak users.

**Policy RCOS - 15:** *Preserve and expand recreational boating opportunities.*

### ***Action Agenda 2003-2008***

- Encourage municipalities to implement recommendations of their harbor management plans to increase mooring and dock space.
- Continue boating safety education and enforcement programs.

- Work with boating and fishing user groups in assessing needs and priorities in acquiring and developing boat launch sites.
- Make development of new boat ramps a priority in areas where few or no boat ramps exist. Assign priority to land acquisitions and facility development for new ramps.
- Protect and maintain existing public and private boat access points and facilities and take measures to discourage the conversion of private marinas to non-water dependent uses.
- Where feasible, construct new boat ramps in local and state parks, especially in the Narragansett Bay area, where additional ramps will improve access to the state park system.

### ***Recreation on Inland Lakes, Ponds, Rivers and Streams***

River systems offer great opportunities to create greenways connecting urban, suburban, and rural areas. In addition to providing opportunities for water-related recreation, they can control and channel growth and help define the form and character of the developed landscape.

The potential to provide water-based recreation opportunities close-to-home is being demonstrated as a system of state and local parks is taking form along the Blackstone River. This recognition of the river as a community resource has stimulated local investments in parks along the river in Central Falls, Cumberland, Woonsocket, North Smithfield, and Pawtucket. The Blackstone can serve as a model showing how a heavily urbanized river system can be brought back as both a recreational resource and a historic landscape.

The involvement of the Rivers Council, established in 1991, watershed associations, private conservation groups, and user groups in river and stream land protection efforts and as advocates and watchdogs has been an essential ingredient of the successes to date, and will continue to grow in importance as public funding becomes tighter. Land protection along rivers should remain a high priority of state and local conservation efforts.

Recreational use of our rivers is high, and access is improving due to the efforts of state agencies, municipalities and Watershed Councils. Additional access points of various kinds should be developed. These points should be well-designed and include effective signage, and adequate parking.

Rhode Island's streams, lakes, and ponds attract many users as well. Providing opportunities for freshwater swimming, especially in the metropolitan region, is vitally important. Swimming areas are often very busy during peak periods and these areas often experience user conflicts. Reducing crowding at the more popular freshwater beaches might be accomplished by carefully promoting underused freshwater facilities, and ensuring that the smaller lakes and ponds throughout the state continue to provide local swimming opportunities. The development of Snake Den Park will provide a major freshwater recreation area proximate to the urban area.

### ***Major Accomplishments***

- DEM created the Sustainable Watershed Office and assigned watershed coordinators to two Pilot Watershed Areas. Seven Watershed Councils were established and have developed five coordinated watershed action plans and two greenways plans.
- In 2001 a new pavilion and renovated beach facilities opened at World War II State Park.
- Several boat ramps, fishing piers, and shore fishing facilities have been constructed at inland sites.

**Policy RCOS - 16:** *Preserve and expand access to the state's, rivers, lakes, ponds, streams and other inland waters for recreational use, while maintaining water quality.*

### **Action Agenda 2003-2008:**

- Promote the establishment of linear parks and riverway land protection in accordance with the State Greenways Plan, Watershed Action Plans, and initiatives of the Rivers Council and regional watershed associations and other conservation efforts.
- Give priority to areas threatened by development, especially in urban areas.
- Focus inland acquisition efforts within identified greenspace areas and greenways providing recreational access to rivers.
- Continue working with the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission to complete the Blackstone River State Park.
- Continue development of the Woonasquatucket River Greenway.
- Continue DEM program of developing portage points and campgrounds along frequently used river systems.
- Continue to support watershed associations in their efforts to protect inland waterways including easement acquisition, monitoring, public education programs, and preparation of programs promoting river preservation among landowners, local officials and conservation groups.
- Assist in watershed-wide approaches to protection of the rivers and inland waters through consistent municipal land use controls and practices.
- Encourage the protection, expansion, and development of new freshwater swimming opportunities, especially in the greater Providence-Woonsocket metropolitan region. Development of new swimming facilities at existing parks, such as Roger Williams and India Point Parks should be explored in addition to the water park planned for Snake Den.

## ***Multi-purpose Management Areas***

Rhode Island's 40,000+ acre management area system provides forests, fields and streams close-to-homes of Rhode Islanders, enabling them to enjoy dispersed, resource-based outdoor recreation such as hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, and trail use.

While not as intensively used as the state's beaches or metropolitan parks, use of the natural resource areas is growing. Population migration from the Providence metropolitan area to regions closer to the rural recreation areas has simply put more people closer to them. Tight household budgets may compel many recreationists to seek their hunting, fishing, hiking, and camping trips closer to home. Also, as larger forest tracts change hands, lands once open for informal public use are closed off, further concentrating recreational use on public forest lands.

With projected rural population increases over the next 20 years, the once relatively remote forest recreation areas are becoming set in more suburbanized regions, adding to the demands on resources and the managers of these areas. In the midst of these changes, management goals should seek to accommodate legitimate usage, while ensuring policies are in place to protect the resources and retain the unique character of these settings. The wilderness-like recreation potential, and their wildlife, rare species habitat, trails, ponds, and scenic values should be protected and maintained through continued multiple-use management approaches.

In the last ten years DEM has recorded 20,000 visits and 60,000 hours of hunting in management areas. Pheasant hunting is a popular activity enjoyed by thousands of licensed hunters from mid-October until Thanksgiving. DEM stocks an average of 3,500 pheasants annually in state wildlife management areas

As development swallows up more open land, access to areas for hunting becomes more limited and the people who move to the more rural areas of the state are largely opposed to hunting near their homes. Yet the federal taxes on hunting and fishing equipment is returned to the state to purchase land for habitat protection and for program operating expenses

DEM acquired one and expanded two fish hatcheries in the past seven years. The programs for stocking hatchery-raised trout are enormously popular and provide not only recreation, but a source of fish that is not contaminated with mercury as are all naturally-occurring freshwater fish.

## ***Major Accomplishments***

- In 1995, DEM acquired the Carolina Trout Hatchery to increase the number of fish raised for release and in 2002 DEM completed Perryville Hatchery renovations.
- Kiosks for display of public information and maps were installed at 30 recreational trailheads at management areas.
- Also in 1995, DEM developed special Canada goose hunting seasons requiring close monitoring of hunter harvest through special permits for September Resident Canada Goose Season (1995-2002) and a Late Experimental Resident Canada Goose Season (1997-2003). Nearly 6,000 special permits have been issued to hunters since 1995 for these resident goose-hunting/management programs. Over 6,300 geese have been reported harvested during these special resident seasons.



- A total rehabilitation of the Great Swamp Shooting Range was completed in 2002. This much needed upgrade of our only state-owned shooting range has resulted in the enhancement of safety features as well as the inclusion of additional shooter amenities and increased handicapped accessibility. The project included reversal of the shooting direction, increasing the height of the backstop and the addition of side-berms, adding a new access road and parking area, and installing a new cement shooting pad with shelter and handicapped access.

**Policy RCOS – 17:** *Provide hunting, fishing, and other extensive recreational opportunities while protecting the resources and natural character of the state's management areas.*

**Policy RCOS – 18:** *Provide opportunities for hunting and fishing, where feasible, throughout the state.*

### **Action Agenda 2003 - 2008**

- Expand youth archery hunt.
- Complete capital improvements at the Perryville and Lafayette fish hatcheries to continue and expand trout stocking at 82 locations.
- Continue to maintain and improve boat launching ramps and shore fishing areas.
- Manage woodland parks and open space areas to provide recreational opportunities while protecting natural resources and wilderness character.
- Land acquisitions should continue to concentrate on expanding large tracts of protected land, protecting trails, and eliminating incompatible development on in-holdings and adjacent lands.
- DEM should continue upgrading camping areas, restrooms, and related user facilities of the woodland system, as resources allow.
- DEM should continue to cooperate with trail and other user groups to undertake facility improvement activities such as trail clearing and maintenance.
- DEM's Management Area Councils and special use permit system should continue as a means to provide coordination, minimize user conflicts, and establish the responsibility of user groups to maintain order and respect the facilities they are permitted to enjoy.

### **Trail Based Recreation**

Walking, hiking, jogging, and cycling are enormously popular in the state and are the most readily accessible form of outdoor recreation. Sixty-six percent of the respondents in the Outdoor Recreation Demand Survey said they participated in walking over the past year and on average went walking 140 days of the year. Over one-third bicycled, on average using their bikes fifty-eight days per year. Mountain biking is also becoming increasingly popular on unpaved trails. Trails are also used by horseback riders, bird-watchers, cross-country skiers, and motorized off-road vehicle (ORV) users, including motorcycle and snowmobile riders.

Trails and paths should be understood in terms of a continuum that ranges from primitive dirt trails through remote backcountry to paved trails in more developed areas to urban trails that might consist only of sidewalks. More remote areas provide critical habitat for wildlife and opportunities for many low impact activities such as hiking, walking, camping, and bird and nature watching. Paved trails, notably the growing system of state bike paths, offer convenient access for residents to recreate and exercise, and in more urban areas, paved trails and sidewalks are connectors to many other recreational and cultural resources.

Given the diverse nature of trail-based activities, it is important that management policies minimize potential user conflicts and ensure sustainability of the resource base. Although user conflicts and resource sustainability issues are raised by many forms of trail usage, the use of off-road vehicles on trails has created the most concern by managers and other trail users. While the number of ORV users is relatively small (4%), the number of days these users engage in the activity is relatively high (63 days per year)<sup>2</sup>. There are a number of types of ORV's that include two-wheeled, three-wheeled, four-wheeled, and snowmobiles. Vehicles might be street legal or for off-road use only. The types of user conflicts and environmental impacts will vary according to the type of ORVs, and how they are used.

The Department of Environmental Management is responsible for setting the rules and regulations for trail use in State parks and management areas and is faced with the difficult task of balancing requests for more access from responsible ORV users with concerns over the impacts upon the resource base and conflicts with other system users. DEM allows limited use of snowmobiles on designated trails in several management areas, and of properly registered motorcycles operated by licensed drivers on specified dirt roads and for specially permitted events for motorcycle groups in the Arcadia Management Area. However, ORV interests have continually advocated for the need for expanded off-road access. DEM's Trail Advisory Committee, comprised of DEM staff and representatives of various trail user groups, has been, and should continue to be the primary venue for considering requests for expanded ORV use. A subcommittee of the Trails Advisory Committee, having balanced representation, should examine the many issues and recommend ways to address legitimate needs within resource management constraints.

In order to meet the current and growing demand, establishing new trails, extending those that are partially constructed, and making connections between existing trails and greenways is a priority. The development of state and local, paved and unpaved, trails that connect existing parks, management areas, beaches, open spaces, and urban centers is key component of this plan.

The concept of trails and paths in natural areas must be expanded to connect with the pedestrian connections in the built environment, primarily sidewalks. It is likely that the vast majority of the Rhode Islanders who walk frequently, if not daily, walk on sidewalks close to home. New shared interests of planners, environmentalists, and public health advocates are seeking community designs which includes opportunities for physical activity. The basic skeleton of this design is a good pedestrian network, one that is well-designed, landscaped, extensive and inter-connective.

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<sup>2</sup> 2002 Public Outdoor Recreation Demand Survey

### **Major Accomplishments**

- In 1993 the state acquired the Trestle Trail property and began design of the Trestle Trail.
- The 72-mile North South Trail along the western border of Rhode Island is complete. The marked trail runs partly along developed public roadways and through state management areas. It is now possible to walk from Charlestown Beach on the state's south's shoreline to Buck Hill Management Area at the Rhode Island/Massachusetts border.
- In 1999 and 2002, DEM opened the first seven miles of the Blackstone River Bikeway.
- In 2000, the first 11 miles of the Washington Secondary/Trestle Trail were opened, along with the first six-tenths of a mile of the Ten Mile River Bikeway, and the first four miles of the South County Bikeway. All of these projects were built by the RI Dept. of Transportation.
- In 2002 the designs for the Woonasquatucket River Bikeway and the Warwick Bicycle Network began, and a handicapped accessible trail was under development in Arcadia Management Area.
- The RI Traffic Safety Coalition formed a Pedestrian Safety Subcommittee in 1998 to examine pedestrian safety needs. A major conference promoting Walkable Communities was held by the Subcommittee in 2000, and RIDOT developed a Pedestrian Safety Plan in 2001. Major recommendations were also incorporated into the Ground Transportation Element of the State Guide Plan.

**Policy RCOS - 19:**     *Maintain and expand the state's network of trails and pedestrian paths, in natural and built areas.*

### **Action Agenda 2003 - 2008:**

- Continue to develop state and local, paved and unpaved trails that connect existing parks, management areas, beaches, open spaces and urban centers.
- Continue to develop, print and distribute trail guides and encourage municipalities to do the same.
- Complete the construction of the Blackstone River Bikeway.
- Continue to develop the Trestle Trail, Ten Mile River Bikeway and South County Bikeways/Trails.
- Implement plans for the Woonasquatucket River and Warwick Bicycle Network Bikeways.
- Develop improved pedestrian connections from the East Side of the Providence River to the East Bay Bike Path.

- Implement a study to monitor how the increased use of the Blackstone Bikeway affects the surrounding ecosystem (e.g. wildlife, waterfowl and water quality).
- Improve the trail maintenance program by ensuring all trails are evaluated and repaired at least once every five years in addition to maintaining them on an as needed basis.
- Continue to address trail use-restrictions, planning, construction, maintenance, and enforcement issues at management areas through the Trail Advisory Committee and the Northwest and Arcadia Management Councils.
- Maximize the trail looping system at Arcadia Management Area.
- Develop a strategy to increase the number of official and volunteer patrols.
- Develop and implement a public education program to minimize conflicts among hikers, bikers, hunters and other user groups.
- Convene a subcommittee of the Trails Advisory Committee with balanced representation to recommend ways to address legitimate needs for off-road vehicle recreation within resource management constraints.
- Continue to promote attention to pedestrian safety issues by providing technical assistance on walkable communities,
- Promote pedestrian safety and walkability by ensuring that proposals for Growth Centers emphasize pedestrian access and sidewalk connections.

### ***Urban and Community Recreation***

The parks and recreation facilities of Rhode Island's 39 cities and towns meet a significant amount of our residents' outdoor recreation needs. Traditionally, facilities for active outdoor recreation, like court and field sports, neighborhood parks, and playgrounds, are provided by local park and recreation entities.

Over 50 percent of Rhode Island's residents live in the Providence metropolitan complex at the upper end of Narragansett Bay. As urban residents continue to migrate out to the state's suburban and rural areas, they are replaced in the cities by new immigrant groups. Many of these new arrivals are at lower income levels, and lacking the ability to travel beyond the cities to enjoy ocean beaches or remote forest trails. As the immigrant and ethnic population of our cities shift, emerging cultural preferences place new demands on our urban recreational resources. Soccer and volleyball have increased dramatically in popularity in the past two decades in response to growing numbers of Hispanic, Asian, Southeast Asian, and Caribbean urban residents. Community gardening on vacant parcels in Providence has also increased in recent years as new immigrants from agrarian regions of the country seek to grow their own native produce.

Despite the number of parks in and near the metropolitan region, many developed urban parks overflow on summer weekends, sometimes forcing park managers to turn people away. Crowding creates management problems, user conflicts, traffic congestion, illegal parking, vandalism, accelerated deterioration of building and facilities and the potential for degradation of the resource base. The crowding is unlikely to abate, and actually might increase as more people seek to recreate closer to home.

Meeting the recreational needs of our inner-city residents must be addressed on many fronts. We need, among other things, to get well beyond the traditional concept of transporting urban residents to outlying parks. We need to embrace the imperative of providing open space and recreational opportunities for people close to home, seizing the scarce opportunities to reclaim open land as it exists in urban neighborhoods. We must provide recreation in communities where it is most sorely needed, re-connect urban residents with the natural environment, and give them a greater stake in revitalizing their neighborhoods.

The State provides assistance in close to home recreation through the recreational grants to the municipalities and in linking urban neighborhoods to state management areas and statewide recreational opportunities through bus service and construction of paved bike paths and trails. The development of Snake Den State Park will provide an easily accessible park for urban residents on the west side of Providence's metropolitan area.

In the past ten years many bikepaths, greenways, and trails have been planned, initiated, and some completed. The East Bay Bike Path connects Providence and East Providence to Barrington, Bristol, and Warren, and provides a direct link to Colt State Park in Bristol. The Cranston Bike Path, Washington Secondary Bike Path, Coventry Greenways, and Trestle Trail (all segments of the same route) connect urbanized areas in Providence, Cranston, and West Warwick to rural landscapes of Coventry, including DEM's Nicholas Farm Management Area near the state's western border. The Blackstone River Bikeway connects urban residents of Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, and Woonsocket with the more rural sections of the Blackstone River Valley in Cumberland and Lincoln, and provides access to features of the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor, and Blackstone River, and Lincoln Woods State Parks. Work is continuing on linkages to create a unified statewide system, as outlined in the Greenspace and Greenways Plan. Linkages of the several routes converging the City of Providence remains a gap, although on-road routes have been designated. Opportunities for permanent connections linking Waterplace Park and the Providence Riverwalk to India Point Park, and to connect to Blackstone River Bikeway in Pawtucket, the Cranston Bikepath, and the Woonasquatucket River Greenway must be realized in order to create a unified system with Providence as a hub.

### ***Major Accomplishments***

- DEM developed Waterplace Park in Providence in 1994 and transferred it to the City of Providence.
- DOT and DEM completed seven miles of the Blackstone River Bikeway, from Lonsdale to Manville in Lincoln.
- The Button Hole Golf Course was developed on state land adjoining distressed neighborhoods in Providence. Through the efforts of the R.I. Golf Association, a program to expose disadvantaged urban youth to golfing, including potential careers in golf, was instituted.

- The Woonasquatucket Greenway, a five and one half mile linear park and greenway is under development. The Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council coordinates Woonasquatucket River Festivals, promoting awareness of the Woonasquatucket River and greenway project.
- The Rhode Island Rivers Council has provided organizational and fiscal support to local river councils that promote recreation as part of their functions.

**Policy RCOS – 20:** *Strengthen and expand opportunities for open space and outdoor recreation for urban residents*

**Policy RCOS – 21:** *Strengthen and expand community-based recreation facilities and open spaces to meet close-to-home needs*

**Policy RCOS – 22:** *Maintain and expand active and passive Greenspace facilities in densely-developed neighborhoods and districts throughout the state*

**Policy RCOS – 23:** *Coordinate regional initiatives in conservation and recreation and promote sharing of facilities to meet needs on a regional, multi-town basis*

**Action Agenda 2003 - 2008:**

- Develop Snake Den State Park, as a multi-use park with water features, trails, picnic areas, and other user amenities.
- Complete the Blackstone River Bikepath, northward from Manville to the Massachusetts border, and southward from Lonsdale to Pawtucket.
- DEM and the City of Providence should work to identify and develop a connection linking the Blackstone River Bikeway (from Pawtucket) to India Point Park in Providence.
- DEM, DOT, and the City of Providence should work to identify and develop a connection linking the Cranston Bikepath from the Cranston/Providence city line to the Woonasquatucket River Greenway/Northwest Bikepath, in order to provide a direct linkage to Waterplace Park and the Providence Riverwalk connecting to India Point Park.
- DEM, DOT, and the City of Providence should work with neighborhood groups to identify and develop a continuous greenway providing pedestrian and bicycle linkages between India Point Park and the Providence Riverwalk.
- DOT will develop a bikepath and walkways separated from vehicle lanes as part of the Washington Bridge south span replacement project, in order to provide a unique urban park, and improve the connection of the East Bay Bike Path to Providence.
- DEM should work with DOT and the City of Providence to encourage development of connections from the Woonasquatucket River Greenway and Buttonhole Golf Course.

- DEM should begin to develop plans for urban connections into Arcadia Management Area.
- Develop programs to provide signage and/or publications for non-English speaking park users, and encourage the hiring of bi-lingual park personnel.
- Cooperate with municipalities to transfer small state-owned recreational areas that serve primarily local recreation needs.
- Community park and recreation administrators should form partnerships with user groups and leagues which use ball fields and courts, encouraging them to participate in their maintenance and upkeep.
- Encourage communities to use local planning and land use controls to obtain land that is well-configured and useful as additions to the locally greenspace system for open space and recreation. Communities should actively use subdivision open space dedication requirements to protect identified natural or recreational features, such as river corridors and trails, rather than isolated pieces.
- Coordinate with city and state officials who are studying vacant land within the urban areas. Investigate the feasibility of use of some of the vacant properties for recreation and open space in the urban areas.
- Ensure that redevelopment designs within urban neighborhoods and growth center initiatives maximize opportunities for recreation and open space and connection to the greenspace system.

### ***Recreation and Tourism***

Tourism is the second largest industry in Rhode Island in terms of revenue. State beaches in the southwestern portion of the state derive 56 percent of their parking receipts from out-of-state visitors. Much of the tourism is linked to activities such as recreational boating and fishing in Narragansett Bay and offshore. Visitors are also drawn to management areas that offer hunting, golfing, skiing, biking, hiking, and bird watching, among other activities. Birding groups of between 20 and 200 visit regularly to observe the fall migration. The tourist industry depends on the same features that are important to Rhode Island residents: a clean, healthy, and accessible bay and beaches, our natural, cultural, scenic, and historic resources, and attractive, safe and accessible parks, management areas, and other open spaces.

We must maintain the balance between high quality recreational experiences, meeting local recreational demands, and tapping the tourist market to ensure that tourists' use of recreation and open space facilities does not overtax them and displace resident users. Better coordination and mutual understanding between recreation managers and the tourism industry can help protect Rhode Island's natural resource base while continuing to generate tourism revenue.



## **Major Accomplishments**

- Waterplace Park and the Providence Riverwalk have become major attractions for tourists as well as residents, as venues for the tremendously popular Waterfire Providence, and many outdoor concerts, plays, and other activities.
- A rest area on Route I-295 is under development as an entry into the Blackstone River State Park and Bikeway.
- A Statewide Greenways Map, was published in 1998 by the R.I. Greenways Council, offering information promoting the greenways, bikeways, trails and natural attractions of the state.
- Fishing, boating, and hunting access guides published by DEM in 2003 include information on licensing, regulations, maps and directions, and safety. The guides are available in print and are also online on the DEM website.

**Policy RCOS - 24: Promote Rhode Island's open space and recreational resources to tourists, while protecting the quality and stability of the resource base.**

## **Action Agenda 2003 – 2008**

- Communication among recreation, tourism, and economic development agencies and private tourism interests should be made more formal and regular.
- Use State/Local Greenways Plans to guide tourist promotion and the development of natural-and cultural resource-based tourist attractions.
- Develop and publish "Watchable Wildlife" guides.

## **4-4 Stewardship and Partnership...Improving Accessibility, Operations and Resource Management**

**Goal 3: Rhode Island's public and private partners will join as strong stewards of the state's outdoor recreation and open space system and will protect, maintain, and improve its essential features**

This part of the plan returns to a more enduring concern: taking proper care of the outdoor recreation system. The key concepts presented in this section are the issues of *stewardship and partnership*.

Proper stewardship of the recreation system requires continuity of mission and a long range perspective. It views short-term problems and needs through the lense of the transcendent principles that lies at the core of the system: our responsibility to the resource base; and to the needs of future users of the system. To be proper stewards we must understand and cherish the value of what has been handed down to us, to protect and better it to the extent of our abilities, to pass it on, unimpaired, to those who follow.

Partnership is not a new concept for recreation system managers and planners. It is, however, a principle they increasingly rely upon in order to fulfill their mission in these resource-scarce times. At base, it implies a recognition that no individual, agency, group, or sector of the recreation system can do the job alone in today's world; but that by looking for common interests and working together we can accomplish great things.

### ***Accessibility for All Users***

Providers of outdoor recreation must serve all segments of Rhode Island's population, including those with special needs, such as the elderly and people with disabilities. Construction standards providing "handicapped accessibility" guide new public recreation facility development and rehabilitation projects. Such standards have opened new opportunities for those formerly unable to access some areas. The Americans with Disabilities Act reinforces the mandate of making the outdoor recreation system accessible.

Concepts of accessibility must exceed minimum architectural standards. Improvements to basic facilities at recreation areas - restrooms and parking, for instance - need continued attention, but attention must be given to finding creative solutions which open the entire recreational experience to those whose mobility, vision, hearing, or other physical disability currently restricts their full use and enjoyment of Rhode Island's recreation resources. Similarly, interpretive and educational programs should strive to accommodate visitors with impaired hearing and vision, and signage can also be improved in this regard.

Since the adoption of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, the state and municipalities have expanded access to recreation facilities for all segments of Rhode Island's population, including those with special needs. About fifty percent of state facilities are now handicap accessible and some facilities have handicap accessible equipment such as surf chairs and hand cycles. DEM and the municipalities work with the Governor's Office on Disabilities to provide full access at new and rehabilitated facilities. DEM received the First Annual Department of Interior Civil Rights Award for outstanding accomplishments in providing equitable services to constituents.

### ***Major Accomplishments***

- In 2000, DEM received the First Annual Department of Interior Civil Rights Award for outstanding accomplishments in providing equitable services to constituents.
- Since 1992 DEM has provided surf chairs to allow handicapped individuals access to beaches; constructed 6 boat ramps, new and renovated, handicapped accessible; built 3 handicapped accessible shore fishing facilities; installed a handicapped accessible goose blind in South Shore Management Area; initiated a Special Deer Hunt for paraplegics and double amputees at Prudence Island, and Fort Greene Army Reserve; amended hunting regulations to allow vehicular access to serve those in need, and provided hand cycles for trails.

- In 2002 a 300 foot handicapped accessible walkway and fishing pier at Arcadia Management Area was completed and an accessible picnic area will be completed in 2003.
- A handicapped accessible mounting block was installed in the Reynold's horseman's area at Goddard Park.
- In 2002 a new ramp was constructed from the parking lot to the beach at Pulaski State Park making for easier beach access.

**Policy ROCS - 25:** *Insure a system that is accessible to all potential users.*

**Action Agenda 2003-2008:**

- DEM will make all its facilities meet Universal Design standards to allow access by physically limited individuals within the next 5 years.
- Continue to expand offerings of equipment such as surf chairs and hand cycles that facilitate access to outdoor recreation to physically-limited individuals.
- Work with the Governor's Commission on the Handicapped to develop and distribute a directory of handicapped-accessible facilities at state and local parks.
- Continue working with RIPTA to maintain/expand bus service to major recreation facilities as resources permit.
- Develop interpretive and educational programs to accommodate visitors with impaired hearing and vision, and improve signage in this regard.
- Provide rest stops on trails for use by elderly and handicapped persons.

**Ensuring Funding Support for the System**

Rhode Island has made a significant investment in outdoor recreation facilities. The value of the 123 State outdoor recreation facilities alone is estimated at \$701 million. The 934 municipal facilities are worth hundreds of millions more. However, the high level of use and chronically shortages of staffing and funding to maintain facilities are beginning to take a toll. Park and beach visitors are beginning to mention overcrowding and maintenance problems at facilities as shown in the responses to the Outdoor Recreation Demand Survey and the Park and Beach User Survey. Moreover, only 21 percent of respondents rated state recreation facilities as excellent in contrast with respondents elsewhere in the country who rate 30 percent of recreation facilities as excellent. The DEM's Asset Management Plans described a backlog of 206 priority repairs and replacements at an estimated cost of \$10.6 million in 2001. Municipal recreation programs are facing the same pressures that the state recreation system is facing.

Capital projects have fared better than operations and maintenance during the last ten years. The citizens of Rhode Island overwhelmingly approve referenda proving bond funds for open space and recreation development. The state capital budget underwrote major renovations at state and local facilities such as Misquamicut and Roger Wheeler Beaches, World War II Memorial Park, and Roger Williams Park. The Department of Transportation and FHWA provide funding for design and construction of state and local bike paths, but not for maintenance.

The experience at DEM's Division of Fish and Wildlife management areas shows what can happen when dedicated public resources are available. The F & W management areas are well maintained and the division is expanding handicapped access to its facilities. The division receives dedicated funding for acquisition, development and maintenance of wildlife management areas and public access areas from anglers and hunters taxes and as well as state hunting and fishing license fees. The division maintains a 5-year asset management plan.

Partnerships with the non-profits and the private sector have become increasingly important to maintaining and developing outdoor recreation facilities as budgets have declined. Legislation proposed to create a group to support parks, such as the Friends of Rhode Island's Parks, was not heard before the 2002 General Assembly. Groups that are formed for a specific site, such as the Beavertail Lighthouse Museum Association and the Fort Adams Trust, draw from local residents who have a special fondness for the site and are more likely to succeed.

For the next few years as state and local government cut back on services and expenses, creative ways of funding and providing facilities and services and partnerships will become even more critical to maintaining our recreation system. It is likely that during the five year time horizon of this plan, park, recreation, and open space managers will continually be forced to stretch their resources to the maximum. As State and municipal budgets tighten, they will need to fight to insure that recreation continues to be seen as a legitimate and important social investment and that it is treated fairly in government budget decisions. We will also need to ensure that all avenues are explored and exploited to minimize operation and maintenance expenses, to make every capital dollar go as far as possible, and to seek creative funding solutions and alternative sources of capital and labor.

The restoration of funding under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act is a bright spot. The federal government has begun to again live up to the promises of partnership it made to the American people in the 1964 Land and Water Conservation Fund Act. The Act's findings of need for federal participation in state and local outdoor recreation are as true and compelling today as they were a generation ago. Restored federal participation in state and local recreation capital investments provides a leadership example, and the leveraging of funds provided by the 50/50 matching ratio of the LWCF stimulates State and local investments in recreation.

Recreation and open space capital needs must be treated as continuing needs which should be systematically programmed and continually addressed. Periodic budget uncertainties underscore the need for the state to consider creating sustainable revenue sources, in place of unpredictable annual appropriations and sporadic large-scale borrowing via bond acts. The establishment of a self-perpetuating trust fund for land acquisition and recreation facility development should be seriously examined. The objectives of such a fund would be to guarantee inflation-adjusted level funding to meet the needs for recreation/open space, and to avoid or minimize the need for bonded indebtedness. Revenue sources which could be examined include fees for extraction or permanent commitment of the state's nonrenewable resources, fees for private use or commitment of lands or waters held by in trust for the public by the state, and an increased real estate transfer tax.

### ***Major Accomplishments***

- Rhode Island and many other states successfully lobbied the U. S. Congress to restore funding to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, with funding restored for states beginning in 1999.

- Rhode Island established the RI Capital Fund, which incorporates major repair and rehabilitation projects.
- DEM worked with the U.S. Forest Service to institute the Forest Legacy Program in Rhode Island, beginning in 1994. Since 1998, over 1,400 acres of forested land have been protected through the purchase of development rights.
- Over \$2 million in State Greenways Program funding, and approximately \$425,000 in National Recreation Trail grants was awarded in 1999 for community, non-profit group, and State projects.
- DEM completed Asset Management Plans for the Divisions of Parks and Recreation and Forest Environment in 2001. These plans detail the conditions and needs of all assets and contain maintenance schedules.
- The General Assembly appropriated \$250,000 for Fiscal Year 2002 for Parks and Recreation asset management needs.

**Policy RCOS – 26:**      *Cooperatively support appropriate levels of funding for the acquisition, development and renovation of the state's open spaces and recreation facilities*

**Policy RCOS – 27:**      *Provide sufficient resources for effective operation and maintenance of state and local parks, recreation facilities and conservation areas*

**Action Agenda for 2003 - 2008:**

- Integrate the Parks and Recreation and Forestry Asset Management Plans into the Capital Budget.
- Determine the cost of a base level of service for state recreation to be funded from the General Fund and develop a plan to allow restricted receipts for costs above that level for capital improvements
- Encourage the creation of organizations, such as friends of the park groups, to support specific facilities or parks.
- Explore the increased application of user fees and concession rentals to offset the expenses of providing, operating and maintaining recreation areas and facilities.
- Resubmit legislation to establish state parks and forest foundations.
- Investigate the possibility of selling special license plates to help fund land acquisition and recreation facility development and improvement.
- DEM and municipal parks and conservation agencies should take advantage of opportunities to use volunteers by providing user groups, watershed associations, and others with information and direction as to what kinds of assistance is needed.
- Encourage the option of working in state or local parks for lawbreakers sentenced to perform community service.

- Design capital projects to minimize long-term maintenance and operating expenses
- Design and maintain all facilities and areas with attractiveness, cleanliness and safety as key criteria.
- Work to curb damage to park resources by vandals and other users.

### ***Sustainable Facilities***

**Policy RCOS – 28:**     *Demonstrate and promote sustainable design and building concepts in recreation projects.*

The incorporation of energy-saving and recycled and vandal resistant materials and design elements such as siting for passive solar gain will reduce pollution, can save energy and other resources and reduce the cost of long-term operation and maintenance of public buildings and other facilities. The use of native vegetation and xeriscaping will similarly save water, reduce pollution and save on maintenance costs.

### ***Major Accomplishments***

- The SCORP Recreation Grant Project Selection Process (RGSP) rating system as amended in 2003 permits awarding points to encourage “green design” - sustainable design elements such as orienting a building for passive solar heating, sustainable building materials, the use of native plant species and plant species that require minimum watering and other maintenance.
- The RGSP also authorizes the award of funds to cover the incremental cost of green design elements that cost more than conventional designs.
- DEM is incorporating green design into the plans for all new facilities and major rehabilitations of existing facilities.
- Composting toilets have been installed at several DEM sites to conserve water.

### ***Action Agenda 2003 – 2008***

- State Energy Office and DEM promote green design to architects, contractors, and the public.
- Continue to incorporate green design into plans for all new and major renovations to minimize operation and maintenance costs, and the use of non-renewable resources.
- The Recreation Resource Review Committee (RRRC) should continue to give additional weight to applications that consider operating and maintenance budgetary needs.
- Continue to use vandal-resistant materials and construction in facility designs.
- Continue to design facilities to maximize visual access for ease of monitoring and enforcement.

- Install more composting toilets at major locations in the State management areas such as Browning Mill Pond Recreation Area and the Arcadia Management Area Check Station.
- DEM will design and build Snake Den Park and the Great Swamp Wildlife Center to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) sustainable design standards.
- Design capital projects to minimize long-term maintenance and operating expenses

### ***Outreach, Education and Interpretation***

Funding for recreation outreach and information continued to be constrained over the last ten years and is likely to remain so for the near future. However, widespread availability of electronic media, particularly computer generated maps and websites, has provided brand new services such as online boat registration and new channels for outreach. DEM information is generated by separate divisions, as funding becomes available. There has been no central entity within the Department to coordinate information and education materials since the Division of Information and Education was disbanded in the early 1990's.

Recent increases in non-English speaking populations in the state have increased the need for outreach materials for these groups as documented in Multi-Lingual/Cultural Services and Outreach for the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, August 2001. The Department has made some progress in reaching non-English speaking constituents, but a great deal remains to be done. DEM publishes brochures in languages other than English and offers a boating safety course in Spanish. DEM is researching translation services to provide wider access to information on its website

DEM education programs include training to teachers in wetlands, water and wildlife topics; classroom ecology sessions and field sampling, fishing programs for schools, clubs, special needs and youths at risk, several boating and hunter safety courses and a Park Naturalist program. However, there are not enough resources to meet demand.

More education and interpretation programs are needed to foster greater awareness and appreciation of Rhode Island's environmental resources. Programs for those with impaired vision and hearing are needed, as are interpretive devices and signs.

Some programs draw on cooperative arrangements. Programs related to the Blackstone Heritage Corridor, for example, involve the National Park Service, and the Parks Association of Rhode Island. State and federal agencies work in partnership with non-profits and municipalities such as the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, Save the Bay and Roger Williams Park Zoo.

### ***Major Accomplishments***

- The Kelley House Museum in the Blackstone River State Park opened in 2002, with interpretive landscaping to highlight historical features.
- A new state recreation map/guide that includes information on natural, recreation, historic and cultural resources of Rhode Island's parks is available on the DEM website.
- A statewide Greenways Map was published in 1998 showing greenway corridors, river/heritage corridors, and existing and planned greenway trails, bike paths, and on-



road bike routes, as well as parks, refuges, and management areas, nature/outdoor scenic features, historical sites, and other points of interest.

- A guide to the Woonasquatucket River Watershed was published in 2001, showing natural, cultural and historical sites.
- The Rhode Island Water Trails Guide was published in 1999. It contains descriptions and maps showing waterways and public landing sites for canoes and kayaks.
- The Handbook of Rhode Island Boating Laws and Responsibilities, published in December, 2002, is available online or in hardcopy.
- An Aquaculture Education program was initiated in 2002 for secondary schools.
- Two new maps -- Guide to Hunting in RI and Fishing and Boating -- were published in 2003, and are available on line.

**Policy RCOS – 29:** *Provide strong public outreach and effective information about public recreation opportunities.*

**Policy RCOS – 30:** *Develop and maximize opportunities for education within the greenspace system about the system and its specific resources*

### **Action Agenda 2003 – 2008**

- Establish an interactive, map-based website that shows the location of all recreational facilities in the 2002 Inventory of Rhode Island Outdoor Recreation Facilities.
- Collect all DEM public information and educational materials on the DEM website and post in one web page with links to other information such as the Economic Development Corporation 's Tourism web page and the RI DOT's Bike RI web page.
- Ensure stable funding for and expand the summer naturalist program in the State parks.
- Compile and publish information on private facilities that are open to the public.
- Seek funding to develop informational materials in languages other than English.
- Provide translated materials on websites with recreation information.
- Update and republish the guidebook --Public Access to the Rhode Island Coast.
- Finalize mapping of all State forest, State wildlife management, and other public lands using GIS.
- Continue to support the environmental education efforts of organizations such as the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, the Watershed Councils and the National Wildlife Federation.
- Update and publish a state Trails and Greenways Map.
- Publish detailed map/guides to marine areas including boating, shore fishing and shellfishing.

## ***Fostering Partnerships***

Rhode Island's greenspace system is complex and has many components. Planning, developing, operating, maintaining the system requires excellent information, strong management and creative strategies. State-local and public-private cooperation is necessary to achieve the goals we have set. Our alliances and relationships must continue to develop and to support each other.

Historically there has been a strong connection between the DEM and the 39 municipalities, formed primarily through the administration of local grant programs. Over the past two decades these programs have distributed more than \$70 million to the cities and towns, in most cases the state funds being equally matched by local government contributions. As successful as the local grant programs have been, however, there can be even greater opportunities ahead to focus on regional efforts between municipalities and the State. Such coordination of efforts is likely to take on greater significance as budgets tighten.

State and local programs for conservation and recreation need not be identical, but to be most effective they need to be complementary and to approach their missions within a regional context. State Planning Council and legislative actions of the past decade are positive steps in this direction. Provisions of the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulations Act of 1988 allow for the coordination of municipal planning activities, and for possible joint planning activities by two or more municipalities. The Statewide Planning Program coordinates state level review of municipal plans by all state agencies, and DEM has a lead position reviewing the elements for recreation, open space and natural resources.

Partnerships with non-profit organizations, particularly The Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society and the dozens of local land trusts, have played a pivotal role in protecting open space throughout the state. Private businesses have also contributed to support of recreation facilities and programs. Some local sports leagues help maintain ball fields. Businesses, individual volunteers, and environmental groups help organize and provide workers for cleanups and special events.

The level of expertise and experience among local park and recreation staff varies. Some communities have experienced full-time staff while others have part-time staff. Four communities have no recreation staff. Communities could benefit from assistance such as seminars for recreation planning, sustainable and cost-effective design and maintenance, and grantwriting.

Partnerships can also play a role in reducing vandalism, littering, break-ins, and illegal dumping which continues at some recreation facilities. Higher visibility law enforcement and increased patrols, possibly even citizen watch groups, of remote areas are part of the answer. Law enforcement personnel need the authority, training, and resources to deter abuse of our open space and recreation areas. Restricting vehicular access to remote areas, especially at night and off-season, can cut down on vandalism. The development of hard-to-patrol sites should be discouraged. In addition, experience in state parks, notably at Scarborough State Beach, has shown that if facilities are upgraded and then well maintained, the level of vandalism drops off markedly.

State recreation officials have also expressed concern about public safety when some facilities fill to capacity on weekends and evenings in very hot weather. Training park personnel in handling conflict, developing flexible enforcement strategies to respond as attendance demands and partnerships with state and local law enforcement agencies will ensure that facilities remain safe.

### **Major Accomplishments**

- The Aquidneck Island Planning Commission and the Washington County Regional Planning Council have both identified their region's most important open space assets.
- Five watershed action plans and two watershed greenspace plans have been published, indicative of the possibilities of regional and multi-community efforts.
- DEM and The Nature Conservancy developed an inventory and map of local land trust holdings.
- The Golf Course at Buttonhole State Park was developed by a private, non-profit organization and is operated by the RI Golf Association in cooperation with DEM.
- DEM developed Waterplace Park in 1994 and transferred it to the City of Providence.
- In 2002, DEM transferred the Block Island State Beach to the Town of New Shoreham.
- The Fort Adams Trust has been recently revitalized through the establishment of the Fort Adams Foundation to raise needed funds for renovations and volunteers provide tours of the fort.
- The rest area on Route I-295 under development as an entry into the Blackstone State Park is a cooperative effort between state agencies and the private sector.

**Policy RCOS – 31:** *Strengthen the professional capacity for recreation, conservation and open space planning at all levels*

**Policy RCOS – 32:** *Maintain a coordinated planning and implementation program for the statewide system that includes State, municipal and private agencies*

**Policy RCOS- 33:** *Encourage information-sharing and cooperative initiatives among the state's public and private greenspace partners*

### **Action Agenda 2003 - 2008**

- Develop a strong, coordinate-information sharing system among state and local agencies with methods to update and maintain inventories and mapped data about natural resources, protected open space and recreational facilities throughout the state.

- Develop a five year work plan and schedule for developing the required state and municipal plans for recreation, conservation and open space in an effective and efficient manner.
- Work to connect the state and local planning and implementation efforts through the State Guide Plan –Comprehensive Community Plan process. The Statewide Planning Program, the State Planning Council, the Governor’s Growth Planning Council, and the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Planning Association will lead this coordination.
- Support the development of non-profit conservation and recreation organizations, and encourage their continuing participation in state and local recreation and open space preservation, operation, management, and planning.
- Request that the National Park Service sponsor training and technical assistance workshops for local park officials.
- Provide technical assistant to municipal planners in recreational and open space planning including updated guidelines for Comprehensive plans, zoning, subdivision and land development regulations and municipal implementation techniques.
- Encourage the Rhode Island Parks and Recreation Association to establish an information clearinghouse and/or to hold workshops on park system management for local recreation staff.
- Encourage private sector operators to provide in-park concessions, including sailing, canoe and boat rentals, refreshments, concerts, and horseback riding.
- Working with local tourism councils, determine the need for additional facilities (such as campgrounds or picnic areas). Encourage private sector involvement to satisfy such needs.
- Investigate Adopt-A-Park programs in other states and encourage the formation of such groups in Rhode Island. Establish a model program, possibly in the Blackstone River State Park.
- Train lifeguards and other recreation facility staff in handling conflicts.
- Develop a flexible enforcement strategy that allows Environmental Police or other enforcing authorities to respond to crowded areas as attendance demands.
- Maintain a coordinated planning and implementation program for the statewide system that includes State, municipal and private agencies
- Encourage information-sharing and cooperative initiatives among the state’s public and private greenspace partners.